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LITTLE LADY CLARE

BY

EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN

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LITTLE LADY CLARE.

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"THEY STOOD LOOKING AFTER TUKE."

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LITTLE LADY CLARE.

BY

EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN,
Author of "The Eversley Secrets;" &c.

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT FOWLER.

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LITTLE LADY CLARE.

INTRODUCTION.

I HAVE been nursing some little cousins of mine, who have all been ill with scarlet fever. Their mother has been ill too, which is the reason why I was sent for; for I live a long, long way off, and I have been here a whole month, and do not see my way to getting home just yet. However, as I like being useful and love children dearly, and as I hear from Nell that she is managing nicely at home and keeping Father comfortable, I am pleased to stay a while longer; and it is nice to hear my little cousins say twenty times a day, that they will never, *never* let me go any more. Dear little things! I love them very much!

But all this does not explain how it comes about that I am actually going to try to write a story—I, who never was clever at all, and who never had time to join even the children's magazine club at home, to

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which Nell and Trixie and the boys sometimes send contributions. But my little pets here are quite determined, and I haven't strength of mind to say "No." I shall make a great mess of it; but perhaps they won't notice or care, and it's only for them I am writing.

You see, whilst they have been ill, I have been called on to tell stories from morning to night, and half the night through sometimes. Children, as everybody knows, fix upon certain stories as favourites, and never tire of hearing them; and the one story in my répertoire that has pleased them most, the story they are never tired of hearing, and ask for again and again, though they must all know it now by heart, is what they call "The Story of Little Lady Clare."

I think one reason why they like it is because it is so long—it takes a whole evening to tell it through from beginning to end—and partly because it is true, and because I know all the people, and come into the story myself, and my brothers and sisters too. Then sometimes I remember fresh things I had forgotten before, which makes a little variety and excitement always possible; and perhaps I tell a true story better than one I have read in a book, or made up out of my head.

At anyrate, the story of little Lady Clare is a great favourite, and now that the children begin to know I

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must some day go home again (though they always pretend they will never let me) they have begun to clamour for me to write down this pet tale of theirs in a book, so that they can read it to one another after I am gone.

I said I really couldn't at first, but when I saw how their hearts were set upon it I promised to try; only I couldn't help telling them that it wasn't the sort of story to be written down, because it had no end. But they wouldn't listen to that objection for a moment.

"Make the end you always make when you tell it to us," they all shouted at once. "Make the end you always do—that begins 'And some day I fancy—'"

They are dreadful little tyrants, so I suppose I must obey them. If they lived nearer my old home, or were ever likely to see the people I tell about, I don't think I should dare to write it all down, and if I thought Lady Tewksbury would ever see the story, I could never write the end, about what I fancy, as she might be very angry, though I know it is just what she fancies herself. However, for these little far-away cousins of mine I don't think it matters much what I say. They are never likely to see Lady Tewksbury, and I don't know after all that it would do any harm if they did. I am only going to write a true story.

I don't in the least know how a proper author would

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set about it. I can only do it in my own way, and put things in the order they really happened, though often I did not hear about them till much later. The talks I shall have to give between little Lady Clare and her grandmother, and other people, she told me about afterwards, and lots of things in my story, I did not hear or see myself, but heard about from her or from others later on. All this makes it difficult to write a proper "I story," as the children call it when the writer tells the tale himself, and sometimes mine will be an "I story," and sometimes it won't. I suppose clever men who write reviews would say it was very clumsily designed if ever it were to be published (which it won't be); but I can't help that, for I never was clever, and I can only tell a story in my own way, which is sure to be a bad one. However, my little cousins don't mind that, and as it is to please them I am writing, I don't much mind about anything else. I shall have to leave them some day before long, and I know they will cry and be sorry; but I think it will comfort them best if I can leave behind for their amusement the written detailed history (so far as it goes) of Little Lady Clare.

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CHAPTER I.

OUR HOME AND NEIGHBOURS.

OUR home is a delightful old rectory house, very near to the church of Deerhurst. It is a queer, rambling, old-fashioned house, and I love it dearly; though some people say they think it must be very uncomfortable to live in such low rooms, all irregular and full of recesses, and wonder that we do not break our legs up or down the queer little steps in the upstairs corridors, leading into the different bedrooms, that are hardly ever on the same level with one another. However, we have never had any serious tumbles since our baby days, and I don't think we should quite know what to do with ourselves in an ordinary square regulation house. We have lived in the rectory all our lives, and we love it with all our hearts. The garden and the house are both delightful, and we are as happy as the day is long.

Our father is Dr. Melville, the rector of Deerhurst, and I am his eldest daughter, Magdalen. I am nineteen now, but I think I look and seem older, for when

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our sweet mother died, eight years ago, when little Hugh was a tiny baby, Father said I must do my best to fill her place; and though the old servants were very kind and helpful, I was always looked upon as the little mistress, and took dinner late with Father, and sat with him in his study afterwards, as Mother used to do.

I always felt, as I grew up, that I had a great deal to think about and to do; and I don't suppose I was ever quite so gay and merry and full of fun as the younger ones, who had less on their minds.

There are six of us Melvilles. My own dear brother Duke is the eldest of us. He is twenty-one now, and he went to Oxford two years ago, just about the time that little Lady Clare's story begins—so far as I can tell it. He has always been the best brother to me, and I love him dearly. I am never so happy as when he is at home. Of the younger ones, Eric comes next. He is fifteen now, and Nell is fourteen. They are very like one another—the beauties of the family. They have golden hair, and very blue eyes, and gentle voices, and graceful manners. Everyone admires them; but I do not think it has spoiled them at all. I am sure Eric would be glad to be less good-looking, for some of the boys tease him and call him "Miss Erica," and laugh at him for his "prettiness;" and as for Nell, she is so fond of her music and her books and her pets,

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that I don't think she ever troubles her head to be vain about her beauty. I am very fond of Nell—indeed I love them all dearly, and I don't think there is ever any real quarrelling in our home.

Trixie and Hugh make the most noise and give most trouble, but we would not have them different for anything. She is ten and he is eight, and they are devoted to one another. You see we go in pairs all through the family—a brother and a sister specially companionable. But then Nell is almost as much my special sister as Duke is my special brother, for Eric is a good deal out of the house at his tutor's, and Nell and I read and work together, and teach Trixie between us; and even if her special confidences are reserved for Eric, I have no reason to complain, for do I not talk to Duke even more freely than to her? We are very fond of one another, and that is all that really matters, I think.

So much for ourselves—now for our neighbours. I don't know that they will come much into the story, but it is just as well to know their names. Perhaps I had better begin with Mr. Turner, the clergyman who settled in Deerhurst several years ago for his health, which had broken down. He helps Father with the duty on Sunday, and takes pupils to read with him during the week. Eric goes every day,

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morning and afternoon—except that Saturday is a half holiday; and Hugh learns Latin with him and some other things, though he doesn't go so much as Eric. Squire Hayward's sons all go to him too—three big boys whom I know quite well, though they are rather too rough and noisy for my taste; and Frank Conway, the doctor's son, who is Eric's "chum" (as they call it), and who comes here often.

The Haywards live in a big square house that was once a farm, but has been altered and added to and made into a gentleman's residence. They are very good-natured, but rather noisy people—"rowdy" Eric calls it—yet not exactly vulgar, for they do not profess to be anything grand, and are not ashamed that their forefathers were farmers or yeomen. They go into society a little, and people rather like them, because they are so good-natured and honest. He loves to be called "Squire," and as there is nobody else to dispute the title with him, he is generally allowed to have it. His wife and daughters dress in very bright colours, and have a great many new bonnets; but then they do not profess to be "gentry," so they vex nobody.

Mrs. Hayward was very kind to us when dear Mother died, so I shall always like her, whatever she wears or says. She came over herself, and took Eric and

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Nell to her house, so as to keep ours more quiet, and was so good to them that they did not cry to come home; and she came every day to inquire. And when I came to her the sad, sad day to say that dear Mother was really dead, she burst out crying as if it had been her own mother, and that made me cry; and then she took me in her arms and kissed and cried over me, and for a moment I felt as if the worst of the pain had gone away.

Ah, well! that has nothing to do with my story, only when people laugh at Mrs. Hayward I feel inclined to say, "Just wait until you are in trouble, and then you'll see." Only, with her red face and loud voice and hearty laugh, it is difficult, I suppose, for people to understand how kind-hearted she really is.

Mr. and Mrs. Conway are perhaps our greatest friends; and their little twin girls, Stella and Laura, often come to play with Trixie, who is very little younger and a good deal bigger. I often think we have very nice neighbours, though there are not many of them, and the poor people in the village are nearly all nice, and I know them every one.

But the big house of the place I have not mentioned yet. It is called Deerhurst Park, or sometimes Deerhurst only. Father says that the house is very old, much older than the church, or the rectory, or

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the village, and that it is the place that is called from the house, and not the house from the place.

I do not mean that Deerhurst Park is such a very large or grand place as compared with many others one could name. Long ago, I believe, it was much larger; but it fell into decay at different times, till the present house is not anything so very remarkable, except for its interesting history and its antiquity. The park, too, I believe, has been much reduced from what it once was, so that many people would not think much of Deerhurst. But it is much the biggest house in our parish, or, indeed, for several miles round; and so we children grew up with the idea that it was a very fine place indeed.

I think I had better begin at the beginning of my acquaintance with the place, and give a little sketch of what happened many years ago.

My early recollections of the house are that it was always empty. Nobody lived in it, and it was kept shut up, with only servants to take care of it. Sometimes I used to get Nurse to let me play in the park; and I loved, if Duke were with me, to steal up to the silent house, and wander up and down the grass-grown terrace, upon which great windows opened that were always shuttered now. Once or twice, to my great delight, some errand would take Nurse to the back

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door, and we were then ushered into the housekeeper's room, and had an interview with that august being. I was immensely curious about the old house, but I was too much in awe of the silent servants to ask any questions. Duke called it a musty old place, and was more eager over birds'-nests in the park, so that I never made much progress in my knowledge of the place. I hardly even knew to whom it belonged.

I learned this, however, by overhearing a conversation between my parents at breakfast one morning.

"I see that Lord Tewksbury is dead," said Father, looking up from the paper.

"Indeed; is he? He cannot be an old man, surely?"

"Barely sixty. He leaves one son, lately married. By the by, I suppose Deerhurst Park will be occupied again now."

I pricked up my ears at this, but asked no questions till I was alone with Mother. I had not been able to understand the talk that had followed, but I knew it referred somehow to Deerhurst, and was mixed up in some way with a "dowager-countess," though what a dowager-countess was I had not the least idea, and that was the first question I asked when I was alone with Mother.

She smiled at my puzzled look of gravity.

"A dowager-countess, my dear, is a countess who

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has lost her husband—at least she becomes a dowager if her eldest son is married;" and then, as she saw I did not understand, she explained it all over again more plainly.

"You see, Magdalen, Lord and Lady Tewksbury were earl and countess; but now that he is dead, his son is the earl and is called Lord Tewksbury, and his young wife is a countess—whereas before they were only viscount and viscountess—and so old Lady Tewksbury becomes what is called a dowager-countess, and her daughter-in-law, so to speak, takes her place. Do you understand now?"

"I understand better, I think; but what has that to do with Deerhurst?"

"Deerhurst Park is what is called a Dower-house. That means it becomes the residence of any dowager Lady Tewksbury, when her son succeeds to the bulk of the property. It has never been occupied during our time here; but I expect we shall soon hear that Lady Tewksbury is coming."

"Won't she be angry with her son for turning her out of her old home and making her into a 'dowager'?" I asked.

But Mother laughed, and said she didn't think so. That sort of thing was taken for granted by people of their class. Most likely she would be more ready to

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leave the castle than her son to take possession. It was not at all likely that there would be any ill-feeling on either side.

I did not ask any more questions, but I kept my ears open during the days and weeks that followed; and, sure enough, I soon heard that Lady Tewksbury was coming to live at Deerhurst Park. I remember very well how excited I was about it; how eager I was to hear what she was like, and to see her in church next Sunday, and how disappointed I felt because she sat far back in a great square pew between two pillars, and kept the curtain drawn the whole time.

But ample amends were made a little while later, when Mother told me one day that she was going to call at Deerhurst Park, and that she would take me with her if I liked.

How well I remember the almost breathless sense of expectant curiosity with which I looked round me, as we were ushered through the square, slippery hall, and into a very large drawing-room, hung with amber and pale blue brocade! I thought I had never seen such a beautiful room, and I wondered if any one ever dared to speak out loud in it. Then Lady Tewksbury came in, and for the first moment her sombre widow's dress disappointed me; for I had fancied some-

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how that she would have been dressed in cloth of gold with jewels, like Queen Elizabeth in a picture I had once seen. Afterwards I got to think that black was just the colour that made her look most grand and imposing. I have always thought that no empress could be more stately, more proud, or more handsome than the Dowager-countess of Tewksbury.

I was afraid of her that day and for many days afterwards, and to tell the truth, I am rather afraid of her still, and always shall be, I think. Yet, she has always been kind to me, and I am sure now that she liked our sweet Mother very much, and talked more freely to her and to Father than she did to anyone else, in our neighbourhood, at least. I just remember that I heard the name of little Lady Clare, and that Lady Tewksbury expressed regret that she had not been a boy. I remember, too, hearing later on of the birth of a boy, who was called the little Viscount, and of Lady Tewksbury's deep disappointment and sorrow when the child died only a few months later. I went with Mother to see her a little while afterwards, and one thing that she said puzzled me a good deal.

"I am especially anxious for a direct heir; for if my son leaves no son of his own, title and estates alike pass to another branch of the St. Maur family—a branch, I regret to say, with whom we have held no

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intercourse for many generations. I cannot express how deeply I should feel it if the property were alienated in that way."

On our way home I asked Mother what she had meant, and Mother, though I think she was sorry I had heard so much, explained that if Lord Tewksbury died without leaving a son, the next Lord Tewksbury would be a distant cousin, with whose family there was evidently some long-standing quarrel. It was a very sad thing, Mother added, when families allowed themselves to be split up into factions, and kept up old grudges and ill-will.

"But there is little Lady Clare," I said quickly. "She is Lord Tewksbury's little girl. Wouldn't she have the house and lands, and be called Lady Tewksbury?"

But Mother smiled and said no. The title and estates in the St. Maur family always went to a man. I thought this very unfair, and said so; but Mother answered that I need not distress myself yet, as little Lady Clare would very likely have a brother some day, who would, in due time, if he lived, become Lord Tewksbury, and keep out the family foes from inheriting the property.

It was not very long after this that our dear mother died; and then for a good many years I hardly saw

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old Lady Tewksbury at all, for I was too young to go out visiting alone. She left cards from time to time for Father, but she was a great deal away from Deerhurst.

She had a small house in a fashionable part of London, I heard, and she spent a good deal of her time with her son and daughter-in-law at Castle St. Maur. I used to hear this much from the housekeeper at Deerhurst, who sometimes came over with presents of fruit and flowers, which she said her ladyship wished us to have. It was from her that I heard in the course of a few years of the death of Lady Tewksbury (the son's wife, I mean) and another little baby boy; and she said that the husband was half distracted by his sorrow, and that his mother would remain with him for some time. To our old nurse, with whom she was very confidential, I heard her say one day that Lady Tewksbury was most anxious the earl should some day marry again. I heard her say so; but I hoped he wouldn't, for I thought if a man had really loved one wife he could never want another. Fancy, if our father were to do such a thing! I just couldn't imagine it.

So we saw almost nothing of Lady Tewksbury and Deerhurst, and I had begun to forget the interest I had once taken in it and its mistress, whilst the

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younger children hardly even knew to whom it belonged, when all of a sudden we heard some news that interested us very much, aroused all my latent curiosity in Deerhurst and its owners, and in fact led up to our acquaintance with little Lady Clare.

And now I must make a skip to a point about two years ago, and begin my story properly.

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CHAPTER II.

ANTICIPATION.

"DEAR me, dear me, what a curious thing!" said Father, as he sat at breakfast one morning with an open letter before him. "I wonder we had not heard of it before."

"Heard what?" I asked, and we all turned and looked at Father to learn what his news might be.

"Why, that Lord Tewksbury is dead. He died, it seems, at Mentone a fortnight ago. My friend, who is chaplain there *pro tem.*, visited him often. He speaks as if he had been in failing health for some time, almost ever since the death of his wife. Dear, dear, what a sad thing—quite a young man too—only five and thirty—and with such a fine property, everything to make life smooth and easy. I had no idea he was out of health; but I wonder we have heard nothing from Deerhurst ourselves."

"It has been such a cold, snowy month," I said. "Nurse cannot get to the Park with the roads so

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heavy as they are now, and Mrs. Blount has had asthma, you know, since November, and has hardly been out at all. I daresay the news has travelled slowly, too, this bad weather. Most likely we shall hear something soon."

"No doubt, no doubt. By the way, my dear, if you felt disposed to drive or ride across to the Park to-day to inquire, it might be as well. I should like to know Lady Tewksbury's present address. I think I ought to write to her. It will be a sad blow to her —an only son, an only child, indeed."

I was very willing to undertake this errand, my old interest in Deerhurst Park was always ready to revive.

"Will Lady Tewksbury come back to live there, do you think, Father?" I asked; and Father said he almost thought she would do so.

"Why?" asked Eric. "Why won't she stay and look after the Tewksbury property?"

Father explained then what I had heard once before, that as Lord Tewksbury had died without leaving a son, the title and estates would pass to the next heir. Little Lady Clare's name was mentioned then, and we all agreed that it was very hard she should not have the right to succeed her father. Eric said it was the result of the law of primogeniture and

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entail, and Trixie asked him how long he had taken making up that word.

The children soon forgot in their chatter all that had gone before. Deerhurst was nothing to them, and Lady Tewksbury only a name. But I thought over it a good deal as I went about my housekeeping that morning, and wondered very much if the dowager-countess would come back, and whether little Lady Clare would ever come to see her. I began to think it might be pleasant to have neighbours at the Park. I had always rather liked Lady Tewksbury, although I stood in considerable awe of her. I think when we are young there is a sort of fascination in this kind of fear. At anyrate, I felt very anxious to know if the mistress of the Park were coming back again.

So after my round of duties was accomplished, whilst Nell and Trixie were still at their lessons, I had the saddle put on old Polly, and trotted through the deep snow-slush of the lanes up to the Park. It was the last day of January, and the snow was melting fast beneath the rays of a warm sun. There was a sort of promise of spring in the air that was very exhilarating and delicious.

As I approached the house I saw that all the blinds were down, and the shutters closed, as if someone

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lay dead there, and I wondered why this was, as it was more than a fortnight since Lord Tewksbury died.

I rode into the stable-yard and gave Polly to a groom, and then I asked for Mrs. Blount, and was taken straight to the housekeeper's room. I think she was pleased to see me, for she dearly loved a gossip about the family; and visitors had been few and far between during this past inclement season. She made me sit down beside her glowing fire of logs, and proceeded to tell me the news that had only reached them three or four days ago.

"Not but what I was quite prepared for the worst," she said shaking her head. "I always did say, when he never held up his head after his sweet lady's death, that he would not be long after her. I saw him last summer, when I visited Castle St. Maur. I saw death in his face then; and when I heard he was ordered abroad for the winter, I said he would never live to come back."

"Who was with him?" I asked.

"Nobody but his servants. He would go alone. My lady tried her best to persuade him to let her accompany him, and bring little Lady Clare; but he would not hear of it. He saw that his ill health depressed the child, whilst my lady's anxiety to rouse him up and

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interest him in life worried and distressed him. He went alone, and he died quite suddenly at the last before any one could be sent for. Ah, dearie me! And to-day he is to be buried at the castle. The funeral is this very afternoon. What a sad thing it seems! And all that fine property alienated to strangers, or worse—for I do think my lady would sooner see it sold away to actual strangers than go to the Cornish St. Maurs."

"Why doesn't she like them?" I asked; but Mrs. Blount only shook her head.

"Nay, that I can't rightly say. Indeed, my lady has never set eyes on one of them, and knows no more about them than you do. But 'tis the old feeling that's been in the family for generations—a sort of feud that has never been made up—and my lady is a St. Maur by birth as well as by marriage, and she feels it all doubly, as one may say. Ah, if Lady Clare had only been a boy now, how different it would all have been!"

After hearing that Lady Tewksbury was at Castle St. Maur, and listening to all the housekeeper could tell me about the arrangements for the funeral, I came to the point in which I was personally most interested.

"And what will Lady Tewksbury do now? Where

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will she live when the new master comes to take possession of the castle? and what will become of little Lady Clare?"

"She will stay with her grandmother, of course. Her ladyship has been appointed guardian, and indeed she has looked after the child ever since her mother's death. As to what they will do I can't rightly say, not having had instructions yet; but I fully expect they will come here. This is my lady's property during her lifetime, and I think she will prefer living here to staying in her London house."

"And if she comes she will bring little Lady Clare with her, I suppose?"

"Yes—I should think so, for sure. There is no one else to take her, and she will never be sent to school. Her ladyship is very fond of her, I know, and very proud-like too."

"Have you ever seen her?"

"Her little ladyship? Why, yes, to be sure. I saw her at St. Maur when I was there. She is as beautiful, or will be, as all the family—a St. Maur every inch."

"She has never been here, I think?"

"No, never."

"How old is she?"

"Twelve years old, going on thirteen by this time —just about Miss Nell's age, isn't it?"

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"Yes—just about. Nell is nearly thirteen. Perhaps they will be friends."

But Mrs. Blount looked a little doubtful, though she did not exactly explain why.

"Maybe, maybe," she said; "but if I remember right, little Lady Clare had no young companions of her own at St. Maur. She seemed always alone, or else with her grandmother and her friends."

"Perhaps she likes old people," I said. "Do you know, Mrs. Blount, I sometimes think they are more interesting than young ones? Eric says I have got 'frumpy' with being the eldest girl, and having to see callers and think about things; but I don't know if it is that really. Perhaps little Lady Clare feels the same."

Mrs. Blount, however, did not seem to know much about her little ladyship, and after a time I said good-bye and rode home again. Everybody there showed more or less interest in the news I brought, but it interested them less than it had done me. They had a sort of idea that the people at Deerhurst would be "too grand," as Eric phrased it, to have much to say to us; whilst I felt pretty sure, from what I remembered of past days, that if Lady Tewksbury made friends for her granddaughter of any of the people about, we should come in for the largest share of her notice.

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Both our father and mother were, as people say, "very well born," and, without being rich, we were in very comfortable circumstances, able to give and accept such hospitality as the place offered, even from so grand a house as Deerhurst. I remembered the time when Mother had been Lady Tewksbury's most intimate friend in this part of the world.

Days, however, fled by, and we heard nothing more of the dowager-countess or her granddaughter. Mrs. Blount had had instructions to get the house in readiness for their reception, but when they intended to come she knew no better than ourselves.

One day about the third week in February, Father called me into his study and put a letter into my hands. It had a deep black edge and a coronet. I saw at once that it was from Lady Tewksbury.

"Dear Dr. Melville," she wrote, "I have been somewhat long in answering your kind note of sympathy, owing to the press of business upon my hands. I hope soon to have the pleasure of seeing you in person; but meantime write to solicit your kind offices on behalf of my granddaughter, who will be an inmate of Deerhurst almost as soon as this letter reaches you. I cannot myself leave this place yet" (the letter was dated from Castle St. Maur), "but I consider it advisable to send Clare away before the

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arrival of the guardian of her father's successor, with whom I am reluctantly compelled to go through certain formalities regarding the transfer of property. The child has been in a very depressed state for some months, greatly feeling her father's declining health. His death affected her painfully, and the uprooting of her life from the ancestral home in which she was born is of course a sad wrench. Indeed, I wish for her sake to get the farewell over without more delay and suspense. She and her governess leave for Deerhurst to-morrow. I shall follow as quickly as may be, but I think it possible that I may not be able to join her under a fortnight. I hope the entire change to a fresh place and a house free from any kind of association will be good for her; and I think that the sight of unknown faces will help the cure better than anything else. I wonder if your daughter Magdalen, who must now, I suppose, be about seventeen years of age, would be good enough to go and see my granddaughter, and if possible make friends with her. Clare is not an ordinary child, nor is she disposed to make childish friendships. She may not be easy to get on with, and your daughter may not care to put up with her whims. Still, if she would make the attempt I should esteem it a favour; as I am convinced that the solitary, brooding way into which she has fallen is the

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worst thing possible for her. She makes no companion of her governess, though Madame Delaine is an excellent and most trustworthy *gouvernante*, nor does she care for the companionship of children. But a friend some few years older than herself might win a way to her confidence, and if Magdalen will undertake what may prove a very ungracious task, I shall be deeply grateful."

There was a little news in the letter, but not of a nature to interest me after what had gone before. I turned to the beginning, and read it all again—all at least that related to little Lady Clare, and then I looked at Father.

"Well, my dear," he said with a smile, "and what do you think of your mission?"

"I should like to do anything I could for her, poor little girl." I always felt a sort of sympathetic sorrow for motherless children, because I remembered our own loss so well, and when I thought that she had lost her father too, I felt I could not be sorry enough. "Of course I will go and see her; I hope she will let me be a sort of friend to her. I think I have always been interested in the people at Deerhurst. When do you think she will be there?"

"I fancy from this letter that she will arrive to-day. See, it is Thursday, is it not? Suppose you make

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your first attempt on Saturday? If that fails, perhaps I will walk across with you between services on Sunday afternoon and see what I can do. Poor little girl, it will be a sad sort of home-coming for her!"

I confess I was a good deal excited by the prospect of going to Deerhurst to make friends with this lonely child. I thought about little else, and perhaps I talked of little else too, which must have been tiresome for the rest.

"Don't you go and get to be a tuft-hunter, Magdalen," said Eric gravely on Saturday morning. Eric had been reading Mill on *Liberty* lately, and was a hot democrat just now, much in the same way as he had been a furious supporter of the divine right of kings a little while before, when studying the history of the Stuarts as told by their admirers.

"What is a tuft-hunter?" asked Trixie, opening her eyes very wide. "Isn't it tufts that pigs hunt for, and that people put in soup?"

Eric went off into a fit of laughter, and Nell said in her gentle way:

"No, that's truffles, Trixie," whereat our little sister, who didn't like being laughed at, shook her head defiantly and repeated her question with more emphasis.

"What *is* a tuft-hunter? and why should Magdalen be one?"

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"A tuft-hunter, my child," answered Eric, "is one who hunts after the society of those blessed or cursed with handles to their names. And I fear I detect an incipient taste in our good Magdalen for that unworthy sport. Would she have taken equal interest in this spoiled child of fortune had she been but a simple village maid—'and not the Lady Clare'?"

I smiled, Trixie stared uncomprehendingly, whilst Nell answered for me.

"Of course she would. You don't understand, Eric. Your head is only full of your own foolish ideas. Magdalen would be kind and good to anyone who was unhappy. And as for you—as soon as you get your next fit on—it will be a very aristocratic one after all this democracy—you will be ready to give your head for an introduction to anyone with such a line of ancestors. And I hope Magdalen will not give you one."

"I trust not, too," was the ready response. "The very name of aristocrat stinketh in my nostrils."

"Don't mix your metaphors, Eric," returned Nell, still as quiet as ever. "How many times have I heard you inveigh against those who do."

"My child, you are getting too sharp; and I must be going. I see how it will be—you will all of you bow down in this house of Rimmon, and we shall hear

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nothing but the name of Lady Clare from morning till night; but I give you fair warning, bring her not into my presence, as she shall have no other title from my lips, but that of citoyenne St. Maur."

Eric swung himself off with his light laugh, and Nell looked after him and shook her head.

"If Lady Clare is the least bit like her name—like what a Lady Clare St. Maur should be—Eric will be her humblest of slaves before another month is out."

"I daresay. Boys are odd creatures, and Eric's moods are as the winds of heaven. Would you like to come with me to Deerhurst, Nell?"

"No, thank you. I am sure you will do best alone. I don't think I am good at making friends. I never know what to say. Besides, I never cared for Deerhurst and the people there as you did. I don't feel as though I should care much for Lady Clare, though I am sorry for her. I wish I liked people more easily than I do; but somehow I don't quite manage it. And if they give themselves airs, as I fancy she will, I don't feel as if I could say a word. Things come into my head that I should *like* to say; but they would not be polite. So then I am quiet, and I feel all frozen up inside."

I knew my gentle sister's silent, frosty moods with strangers too well to dispute the point with her. Some-

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how Nell was really more difficult to get on with than any of us—for strangers I mean. At home she was the sweetest tempered of us all. I think she was very clever and far-seeing in her own way, and too young not to be intolerant. I admired her very much; yet sometimes when I had to play the part of hostess to unwelcome guests, and make little polite speeches that were necessary, yet not quite sincere, I was glad that Nell should not hear me. I felt I *must* be cordial and courteous to Father's guests and old friends, and that it could not be wrong to seem pleased to see them and to press them to stay, even whilst I longed for them to be gone; but Nell would say, "Truth first, and politeness second," and I never could argue with her, though I did not see how I could act otherwise. It is very hard to know always what is right; but Father told me once that the best way out of a difficulty, which everyone feels more or less, is to try and put ourselves in the place of others, to enter into their feelings and really *be* pleased to see them, really *wish* to make them welcome by showing cordiality and kindness. He said, "Try to *feel* not only to *seem* pleased;" so I began to try, and I really have found that he was right. Most people have something nice about them if one only can get at it. Only it is so much easier to see what is tiresome or stupid than what is nice, and our

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eyes are so dreadfully sharp that I did not find it easy at first to turn round and only hunt for the good points. However, I think I am learning at last, and it does make things easier, and I begin to understand now why our sweet mother was always so good to everybody, and why they all loved her so. She always got at what was nice in people, and if she saw other things —as she must have done often and often—she did not talk about them, or make others see them too; so everybody loved her and she was everybody's friend —and, oh! if only I could grow up like her how happy I should be!

Nell does not think quite as I do about these things, partly most likely because she can only just remember Mother, so I was not very sorry that she decided not to come with me to the park that afternoon. If she did not like the little stranger, she would not pretend that she did, and although Nell's manners were always very graceful, and she spoke in a gentle way, it was quite easy to see if she did not take to a new person, and she somehow let that person know it very quickly.

Trixie would have liked to go; but she was such a little romp that I hardly dared to take her on a first visit. She might have made things easier, but I never knew what she would say. She might come out with

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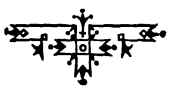
some of Eric's nonsense about "aristocrats," or ask questions that would give pain or offence. Little Lady Clare was evidently a difficult subject, and in the end I walked off quite alone to go through the ordeal of a first interview.



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CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST VISIT.

IT was with a heart that beat somewhat more fast than its wont that I stood before the great hall door at Deerhurst, and rang the ponderous bell. I had not paid a state visit there since I had been taken by my mother, when she paid her calls upon Lady Tewksbury; and the memory of those old days helped to unnerve me more than I had anticipated. The door was opened by a man in a very grand but very sombre livery. I asked if Lady Clare were at home, and was answered in the affirmative, but I could see that it was considered doubtful whether she would see any visitors that day.

I decided to see Mrs. Blount, before any message was sent to Lady Clare, and in a short time the housekeeper joined me in the little ante-room into which I had been shown.

I explained to her the reason of this early visit, and told her what Lady Tewksbury's wishes had been.

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"But if Lady Clare won't see anybody," I concluded, "it isn't much use my coming."

"Her little ladyship has a will of her own—that she has," was Mrs. Blount's dictum; "and has been used to exercise it, too, as is easily seen. But this is her grandmother's house after all, and *her* wishes ought to stand first. It isn't good for the child going on as she does. She ought to be roused up, even if she is angered by it."

"How does she go on?" I asked.

"Well, that is what nobody quite knows, because she will have nobody with her. The French madame, who takes her meals with her, cannot manage her any better than the rest of us. She comes to table and takes the head and madame the foot, and they talk in French all the time, as stately as you please; and after that her ladyship retires into the great vestibule-room behind the hall with her dogs, and there she stays shut up and perfectly quiet till the next meal comes round. She will do no lessons, she will not go out, she will allow nobody in the room with her. I don't think she cries much; no one ever sees her with traces of tears upon her cheeks. She doesn't seem to fret as other children would. She isn't a bit like a child, nor like anybody I ever saw. I don't know what to make of her; neither does anybody else, I think, unless it be her grandmother."

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This was not an encouraging account.

"Then I suppose there is no chance of her being willing to see me?"

Mrs. Blount shook her head.

"Not if we go and ask her, I'm sure."

"Then shall I go away and try another day? or would she see Father to-morrow, do you think?"

Again came a significant shake of the head.

"She won't see anyone, you may take your word for that, if she is asked her will in the matter. The only way will be to take her by surprise."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, just go in without a word, and see what you can do with her."

"Oh, I shouldn't like to do that. It would be so strange."

"Strange folks sometimes take to strange ways."

"She would think it a liberty."

"Maybe; but it's the only way."

"I do not know if I ought. I cannot tell if Lady Tewksbury would wish it. She did not say I was to force myself upon her."

"Well, I don't think my lady would object, if that's all you're afraid of. She would be very anxious if she could see the child now."

I do not know how much was curiosity, how much

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the wish to please Lady Tewksbury, or how much the hope of cheering up the lonely little girl; but after a few minutes' hesitation I said I would do as Mrs. Blount suggested, and intrude upon Lady Clare unawares.

The housekeeper seemed well pleased at this decision. She rose with alacrity and led the way through the hall towards a pair of double doors between the two flights of oak stairs that led up right and left to the corridors and gallery above. These doors she opened very softly, and motioned me to enter alone. I did so quietly and cautiously, and stood looking round me with a good deal of curiosity.

I found myself in a sort of large room, almost more like a hall than an ordinary room. It had a slippery parquetry floor, with some thick Turkish rugs and some beautiful skins lying spread out in different places; and it was lighted from the roof, which made one think it must have been built for a billiard-room, although there was no table. There was not much furniture there — only some carved oak chairs, a grand piano, and a sort of luxurious couch, half a chair, drawn up to the blazing log fire upon the hearth. There was a great deal of curious armour hanging against the walls, as well as one or two pictures—portraits for the most part; and the whole place

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looked very big and lonely, and rather desolate by reason of its size. But I saw all this at a glance, though it has taken some time to write it down. At the moment I had no time to think of anything but the one little figure in this great lone place.

Little Lady Clare was half sitting, half lying in the big chair-couch by the fire; and I think she was half asleep, for her eyes were fast closed, and her head lay back against the dark crimson cushions in a sort of abandonment that suggested the slumber of childhood. I stood and looked at her; and I think the tears must have come into my eyes, for they grew quite dim and misty, and I had to wipe them before I could see clearly.

It was such a sad little face—all the sadder, I think, because so very lovely. I cannot describe people as a real author could, I can only say that the little girl I was looking at was simply lovely—such delicate features, such a pure, pale complexion, such long, black eye-lashes, and such a mass of rich, golden hair falling in heavy, natural curls all round her head, and waving right down to her waist. I never saw such hair before or since, so very thick, and soft, and sunny. We used to admire Nell's fair locks, but Lady Clare's rich, golden tresses quite took the shine out of hers. She wore no ribbon, or snood, or comb, and the hair was

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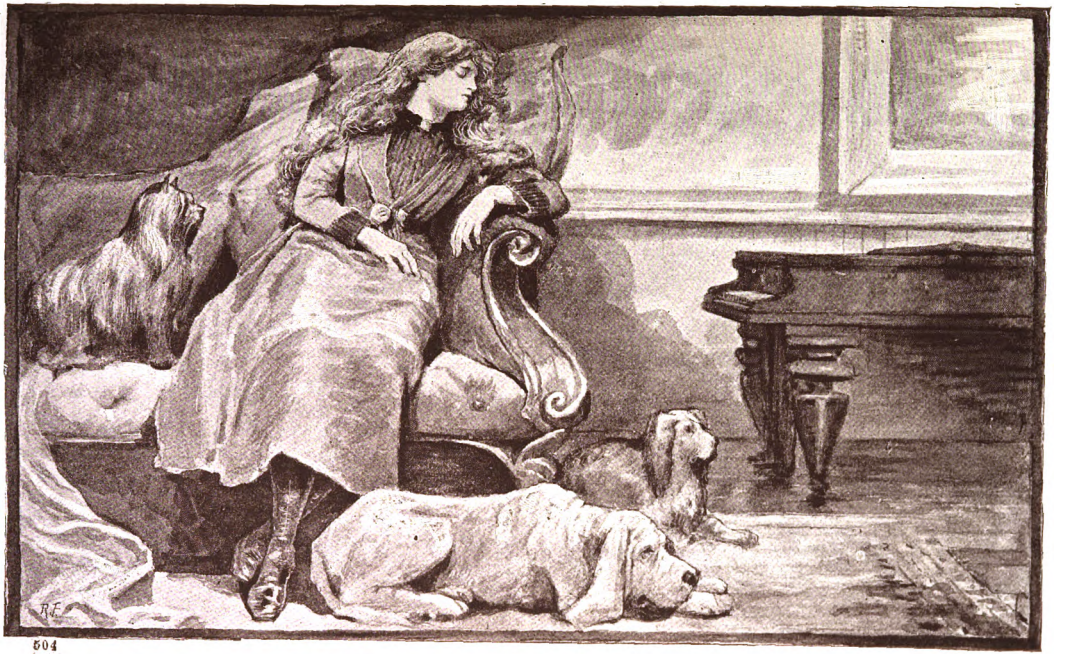

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LITTLE LADY CLARE AND HER FAVOURITES.

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never plaited or tied back. It hung round her always in a sort of cloud, and framed her face like an aureole about the head of a saint or cherub in a picture.

She was dressed in black—very deep black, almost all crape. Her figure was very slight and graceful, her little legs in their black silk stockings were very slender and delicate, like the white, small hands that lay crossed in her lap. A very large bloodhound lay at her feet with his head on his paws, and a little Yorkshire terrier was curled up beside her on the couch-chair. A brown-eyed spaniel occupied another chair, and as the door opened to admit me, three pairs of sharp eyes were fastened at once upon the intruder.

So long as I stood at a respectful distance, watching their little sleeping mistress, the dogs raised no voice against me, but when after a few moments I began to come nearer, the bloodhound uttered a low, deep growl, and a sort of red light seemed to leap into his brown eyes. The little terrier, too, sat up, pricking his ears, and uttered a short, sharp bark.

I was fond of dogs and not at all afraid of them, but there was no time to make advances; little Lady Clare's eyes were wide open now, and it was the mistress, not the servants, that I had to try and propitiate.

I did not in the least know what to expect at this

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first interview. Would the little lady fly into a passion? or would she sulk and refuse to speak a word? How would she manifest her displeasure? I stood before her, feeling rather like a criminal at the bar, and yet half disposed to laugh. It was absurd to stand in awe of this slight, pale child, whom I longed to take in my arms and pet, as I sometimes still petted Nell.

Little Lady Clare rose quietly to her feet, and her face assumed an expression of great dignity.

"I *beg* your pardon," she said in very clear, distinct tones, in a voice that was particularly musical; "but I did not hear you announced."

"I am afraid I awoke you," I answered, not knowing what else to say. "Mrs. Blount brought me to the door, but you were asleep. She thought you were rather dull all by yourself."

"Mrs. Blount is *very* considerate," said her little ladyship, still standing very straight up and looking rather like a wax image at Madame Tussaud's. "I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, but if there is anything in which I can serve you, it will give me great pleasure. Be good enough to state the nature of your errand."

Anything more perfectly crushing than the child's manner was meant to be can hardly be imagined; and

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yet withal Lady Clare did not make herself look ridiculous, as almost anyone else would have done, who assumed the fine-lady air to that extent. I often saw her do the same thing again, and yet I never felt inclined to laugh at her. It was more like seeing some actress on the stage go through her part. One knew it was all a sort of make-believe, but it was too well done to seem absurd.

However, I was not at all daunted by her little majesty's visible displeasure.

"I am Magdalen Melville, the clergyman's daughter," I answered. "I know Lady Tewksbury; she was my mother's friend once, and was very kind to me when I was a little girl. She asked me to come and see you whilst you were alone in the house. That is why I am here this afternoon."

"You are very good," said little Lady Clare, in the same clear distinct way, that sounded somehow a little ironical. She advanced one step nearer, held out her small hand with the air of an empress, and then retreated to her throne again. "Pray be seated, Miss Melville. I believe I have heard Lady Tewksbury mention you."

I sat down in a straight-backed chair on the opposite side of the hearth, and the dogs all came and sniffed me. Their mistress called them to order.

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"They know that I have got dogs at home," I said, caressing the head of the bloodhound. "What a beauty he is! I should think he was quite as big as an ordinary-sized calf. What is his name?"

"I call him Cortès, because he is so strong and so determined and watchful, and because his manners are so good. The spaniel is called Fib, not because he is untruthful, for he is the soul of honour, but because he is amphibious. It is a corruption, in fact. This one is Wuffles, because he is so small and so soft. He goes everywhere with me, and sleeps on my bed at night. Cortès sleeps outside my door."

"You are well protected, then?"

"I suppose I am—rather too well, I think sometimes;" and she laid her head wearily against the cushions.

"Why too well?"

There was no answer, only a sort of sigh; but as I did not speak she presently said:

"I don't suppose you would understand; but I wish I had lived hundreds of years ago, when there was real danger, when men went out to fight and the women guarded the castles at home. I do despise the present day—there is no chivalry left—no honour, no danger, no glory. You don't understand; but I *hate* it. Think what the St. Maurs have been, and what

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they are now! Think of the present Lord Tewksbury!" The scorn in the childish voice sounded regal in its proud intensity.

I was surprised at the readiness with which my little companion talked when she had once satisfied herself of my identity. It is true that the reserve of manner remained, and when she spoke about the dogs, it was with an air of "making talk" rather than of taking pleasure in the discussion of her favourites; but the last sentence was spoken with more energy of manner, and the dark violet eyes dilated and flashed with something very like passion.

Perhaps the question was not wise, but I could not resist the temptation of putting it.

"Who is the present Lord Tewksbury? I do not know anything about him."

The child's cheek flushed. She made a little queenly gesture with her hand. Nothing could have expressed a finer sense of scorn.

"Of course you know nothing about him—nobody does—nobody respectable at least—nobody *we* should be likely to know. He is one of the Cornish St. Maurs—that is all I know or wish to know. And he dares to take my father's place and title. Oh, how I hate to think of it!"

I am sure that tears stood in the dark eyes. The

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child's hands were clenched as if to keep down a rising agitation. Were those tears, tears of anger or of sorrow. I almost think the former.

"It must be very hard to see it," I answered. "I think I understand, better than some people would, how hard it is."

Her eyes were fixed sharply upon me.

"Why?" she asked quickly.

"Because, you know, I live in a rectory house—a dear old-fashioned house where we were all born, and which we love as dearly as you love your home—at least I think so. But if our father were to die, we should all have to go somewhere else, and there would be a new rector of Deerhurst, a stranger, who would come and live in our home and take our father's place. I have often thought how very, very hard it would be; so I think I can understand better than some people how very hard it must be for you."

I was not sure that she would like this comprehensive sympathy, but as it happened it seemed to please her; only she accepted it with a certain reservation.

"Ah, but it would be a stranger that would come—a stranger only, not an enemy. And you would not have the feeling that in justice and right everything should have been yours. If I had been a boy instead

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of a girl, Castle St. Maur and all the property and the title would be mine."

"Then your sorrow is more for the loss of the estate than for the death of your father?"

I do not know why I said those words; perhaps it was rather unkind, and certainly it was a liberty on a first interview; but they came into my head and I had spoken them before I had had time to think.

Lady Clare's eyes flashed. She rose suddenly to her feet and pointed to the door.

"If you have only come here to insult me, you had better let me wish you good morning before you go any farther. I might have expected it from the way in which you forced your presence on me unawares, when you must have known it was unwelcome. I tried to tolerate you, as you were an acquaintance of Lady Tewksbury; but patience has its limits. Go! I never want to see your face again!"

In the last words there was a quiver that spoke of coming tears. Before I had reached the door, to which I obediently turned, I heard the sound of hoarse, passionate sobs. I looked round to see her little ladyship crouching down upon her chair in a perfect tempest of misery, her face hidden in the masses of her hair, and pillowed on the neck of sympathizing Cortès.

She might be as angry with me as she liked, but I

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could not leave her like that. I had not tried to fill the mother's place to four younger ones at home for so many years, without having a little bit of the mother's instinct in me; and to go away without a word, when a child was crying her heart out only a few yards away, was just one of the things I could not do.

So I came back and knelt down beside her, and drew her into my arms just as I should have done had she been a little sister.

"Don't cry so, darling," I said. "Forgive me for hurting you by my thoughtless words. I was very stupid, but I did not mean to be unkind. Dear little Lady Clare do say you have forgiven me before I go. I'm so sorry. I know that they were unkind words, and not true."

I half expected to be repulsed: to be bidden again to go, to have another struggle before I was allowed so much as to stay in the room; but to my surprise the child let me hold her in my arms, and the golden head was drooped upon my shoulder, till at last amid the sobs I heard the whispered words:

"But it was true—partly true at least. I don't think I knew it till you said it; but it is true—it is true—and that is what is so dreadful, and makes me so miserable."

"What is true?" I asked perplexed, not certain if I caught her words correctly.

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The answer was some time in coming. The child waited till she could control herself, and then she sat up and pushed the heavy waves of hair out of her eyes.

"I'll tell you," she said, speaking with more coherence and self-command than one would have expected after such an outbreak of tears. "I don't think I understood before. I thought it was all because papa had died that I was so unhappy. People said so, and I believed them. I did love him, and I did think it dreadful for him to die all alone away in France, and only come home to be buried. It made me miserable to think about—but—but—that wasn't all—though I thought it was."

She paused, but I did not speak, and after one searching glance into my face, she went on again of her own accord:

"But if things had been different, I don't think I should have been so miserable just because papa had died. I loved him—indeed I did—but it often made me sad to be with him. He got very sad himself, and that made me wretched; and sometimes when he went away I was glad, because he used to make me feel so sad. If, when he had died, things had gone on just the same, I should have been very, very sorry; but I don't believe I should have felt what I do now

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I didn't think about it before, but I don't believe I should. If I had been able to take the title and estates —as grandmother so much wishes the patent would allow—if I had been Countess of Tewksbury in my own right, and mistress of Castle St. Maur and all the estate, I should not have been half so wretched. I love my home. There is no place like it in all the world; but when papa died I knew I should have to go, and worse still—that it would belong to a stranger —an enemy—to one of a detested race. Ah, you don't understand. You've not been brought up in traditions of hate. To think of our happy beautiful ancestral home being *his*—to think that *he* is Lord Tewksbury now! It breaks my heart, it does indeed. But yet I never knew till you told me how much was for that and how little for papa."

Her head drooped again to my shoulder. I kissed her through her veil of hair.

"Little Lady Clare," I said; "it is very hard always to feel rightly, and to separate good from evil. I know just how you feel—at least I think I do—and I am so sorry about it; for it must be very hard to lose so much. Then one's home is so very dear, that it is horrid to think of other people, especially people we don't like, living there and taking our place as it were. Indeed I am very, very sorry for you, and I should

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like to be your friend if you will let me. I lost my mother, my dear, sweet mother, when I was just a little younger than you are, and I know how desolate it feels; and your father was all you had left. I know you must miss him very much without anything else, and be very sad, especially now you are all alone. I have plenty of brothers and sisters at home, or I don't know what I should do. It is always nice, at least I think so, to have somebody to talk to and talk troubles over with. You will have your grandmother home pretty soon, but a fortnight is a long time to be all alone in a big house. Will you let me come to see you sometimes? and will you come to my home some day and see my brothers and sisters? We shall be quite near neighbours as long as you live here, and I think it would be nice to be friends too."

I felt very bold at making this proposition, which I certainly had not meditated doing half an hour, or even ten minutes ago; but this sudden burst of confidence had established a certain bond between us, and I thought I could speak out without fear of giving offence.

"I should like *you* to be my friend," said little Lady Clare, lifting her head and looking at me very gravely and earnestly. "You have been kind to me and I like you, though I didn't mean to at first. I shall be

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pleased to see you always; but I must think about the rest. I'm not quite sure yet."

"Will you let me bring my father to see you to-morrow? He would be pleased to pay his respects to you. He knows your grandmother quite well."

"Dr. Melville will be welcome at any time," answered her little ladyship with grave courtesy; "I know his name very well."

And when I rose to go she let me kiss her again, and ordered the dogs to shake hands, and smiled when I said I should come again soon.

I went away feeling that I had accomplished more than I had expected; and I was very glad I had been alone. Still I did not imagine that little Lady Clare would always show herself quite as gracious and friendly as upon that first interview. I could see that she might not always be in a mood as yielding as the one in which I had found her to-day.

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CHAPTER IV.

HER LITTLE LADYSHIP.

I AM afraid if Eric had known how large a space in my thoughts was filled by little Lady Clare, he would have talked again about tuft-hunters, and would have made many of the accusations that so puzzled Trixie.

I do not myself think that her title had anything to do with it, but I admit that the picturesque setting of the old house, the alienation of the family property, and the "history" or "romance" attaching to the story of this little lady of rank had its fascination for me, and gave me a good deal to think about.

Father and I walked over to Deerhurst on Sunday afternoon. Lady Clare had not been at church, and I was half afraid lest her crying fit of the previous day, for which I held myself partly responsible, might have brought on a headache. Father was much interested in all I could tell him of the little girl and her loneliness and sorrow, and said "poor child, poor child" many times to himself. He looked grave as he

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heard of the way in which she talked of the kinsfolk who had succeeded to her ancestral home, and he shook his head sadly.

"It seems as if a child might well have been kept in ignorance of a worn-out grudge generations old. What a strange, sad thing it is—that hugging of grievances, that resolute determination to keep up an old feud long after the original cause of offence is done away with. And that, too, amongst those who call themselves servants of the Prince of Peace. Ah, we live in a strange world, my dear,—in a strange world!"

"Do you know the history of the feud, Father?" I asked.

"No, my dear. Only this much, that it began in the days of the Stuarts, when this branch remained loyal to the king, and the other went over to the Parliament. For a time these latter succeeded to the sequestered estates of their kinsmen, but a generation later they were bought back. Since then there have been, I believe, minor differences—differences in politics, in social views, and other points; so, one way or another, the old sore has never been healed, and the breach seems as wide as ever to this day. Of course, with the extinction of the old line, the feud must die out; but meantime, of course, it seems hard to those who have always held the estates to see them alienated in this

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fashion. Still I do think the child might have been spared the knowledge."

"I suppose Lady Tewksbury brought her up; and she feels things very strongly."

"True, and children are very quick to catch hold of any idea of the kind."

Little Lady Clare received us in the drawing-room. Her dogs were gathered about her, and the French governess was sitting in a distant window.

Father has a great deal of tact with children, and always wins their hearts. He treated her little ladyship with just the mixture of deferential courtesy and fatherly affection that won her confidence without hurting her dignity, and I saw in five minutes that these two were going to be friends from the first.

She apologized very prettily, I thought, for not being at church. Her head had ached a good deal in the morning, and she had never been alone to a strange church in her life. She was afraid to trust herself, she said, with a little blush and faltering in her voice, and then she rang the bell and tea was brought in on a beautiful silver tray, and she proceeded to pour it out with a grace and self-possession very pretty to see.

Madame Delaine, who had just been presented on our entrance, now approached, and Father, who is an excellent linguist, began talking to her in her own

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tongue, and little Lady Clare, who spoke French as easily as English, joined in every now and then, until she observed that I was a little embarrassed by the foreign tongue (for though I could understand French, I was not very ready in speaking it), when she at once changed her language to English with a graceful tact worthy of more advanced years; and she talked to me for the most part during the remainder of our visit.

It was a pleasant little call, and Father had been pleased. I think he had given pleasure, too, to both his hosts. Everybody must like Father, I always do think.

The next time that I called at Deerhurst, I was told that her ladyship was out driving. I saw Mrs. Blount for a few minutes, and she told me that she hoped the little girl was cheering up rather more, but that she still lived in the same lonely fashion with her dogs, and to-day was the first time her governess had been able to persuade her to leave the house. Her favourite horse, however, had just arrived from Castle St. Maur, and perhaps she would take to riding now, an exercise of which she had always been very fond. Mrs. Blount hoped she would do so, as she was sure it could not be good for her to mope in doors all her time. And this hope seemed destined

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to be realized; for the very next afternoon, as I was paying a series of parish visits on old Polly, I encountered little Lady Clare mounted on her black Arab, with Cortès and Fib and a smart groom in attendance.

We met at four cross-roads, just as my visits were all paid, and Lady Clare smiled at me in a quick, sudden fashion, her face growing grave again almost at once.

"I am glad you ride," she said. "Will you let me ride with you to-day?"

"I should like to go a little way with you very much. I can't stay out much longer, for Polly has been out a good while and she is getting old; and I must be home again for tea. But I will take you to the common first, and show you the view over the ridge. It is lovely."

"Thank you," she said; and as we walked our horses along the road together she said somewhat abruptly, "I have never ridden since before—before everything was different—before these horrid troubles had come. I thought I should like to be out on Arabi again, but I didn't. It all came back so sadly about everything. I am glad I met you. I want to talk about other things. I want to keep my thoughts away."

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I think she saw sympathy in my face. She gave me one little quick glance that said a good deal, and then she turned to look at Polly.

"You have a very good horse. I like a horse that can carry his coat all the winter."

"Yes, dear old Polly is thorough-bred. She has been a great pet all her life; but she is getting very old now. She is more like a dog than a horse in her ways. She does not do much now but carry me my parish rounds."

"Do you visit your poor people like that? But how do you manage without a groom?"

"I just tie the bridle to a gate when I get off, and there she stays quite quietly till I come back, and stands at the gate, as good as gold, for me to mount again. If there is no gate she will stand at the cottage door like a big dog when I go in, and follow me all down the village street if I have several houses to go to. Polly is as well known in Deerhurst as I am, and has almost as many friends."

"What a nice, dear horse!" said Lady Clare, reaching to pat the glossy bay neck of the old favourite. "How nice it must be to go about like that. I wish Grandmother would let me ride without a groom. I do hate always hearing the man coming on behind. The dogs are quite protection enough."

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"Father likes us to take the groom if we go far, unless one of the boys is with us; but just for going about the parish Polly and I are independent of escort. It is different for you. You have plenty of horses and servants."

"Rather too many—servants at least!" and Lady Clare looked rather hard and scornful. "I hate always having a maid or a man at my heels. When I am grown up I shall arrange things differently. Now, tell me some more about yourself and your life. Tell me what you do when you go to see people on Polly. What do you say to them, and what do they say to you?"

It was rather a comprehensive question, but I told my little companion a good many details about the parish and the poor, to which she listened with great attention. I told her about our shoe club and clothing club and lending library, and anything else that I thought might interest her. When I had done she heaved a great sigh, and said:

"How busy you must be!—and how happy!"

"Yes, I am always busy, and I am very happy too. I think having enough to do is half the secret of happiness."

Lady Clare made a little *moue* and shrugged her shoulders French fashion.

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"That depends what kind of work one has."

"Does it?"

"Yes. It is nice doing useful, sensible things; but if it were spending hours and hours over Italian and music and drawing—silly accomplishments that do nobody any good, you wouldn't say the same. I like good solid reading, but I detest *frippery*."

"I never had much time for accomplishments," I said; "for Mother died when I was quite little, and as soon as ever I was old enough I had to help Father and to manage the house. I often wish I had been able to go on with the things you call frippery. As for my sister Nell, she is never so happy as when she is able to get a little teaching in music or drawing; and when she can't get it, she teaches herself. She is as busy in her way as I am in mine, and quite as happy. She is fonder of learning than of anything. She tries to keep up in most things with Eric—the brother, a year older than herself. Those two are the clever ones of the family."

"Ah, if only I had a brother!" sighed little Lady Clare. "What a difference it would make in everything! I should like to do boys' lessons, I think. If I had a brother I should love to work with him, and keep up with him. How many brothers have you?"

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"Three. The eldest is at Oxford; he won't be home till Easter. Eric is the next; and then little Hugh, the pickle and plague of the family. Nell and Trixie are my sisters. Some day I hope you will know them all."

We had reached the ridge by this time, and I pointed out several places of interest that could be seen in the blue distance; but little Lady Clare did not seem to care very much about hilltop, or spire, or beacon.

"May I ride home with you?" she asked, as we turned our horses' heads southwards again. "I should like to see the house you live in, and the church Grandmother has told me about. No, thank you, I don't want to come in. I didn't mean that; only to leave you at the door, and just see what kind of a place it is. When I know people I always feel as if I wanted to see their houses, so as to have a sort of picture of them at home."

So my little companion rode by my side all the way back, and she laughed to see how eager old Polly grew as she neared her own stable, and how she set off at a certain point in the road at a brisk canter, and only pulled up when she had reached her own gate.

"Come up the drive with me," I said, "it is your nearest way home now, and then out by the other gate

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towards the churchyard. You will see the house then, and the sunk lawn—the old bowling green, which they say is three hundred years old. There, you can see the south front of the house from here. It is not much to look at, except when the roses are in full bloom; but we love it always, it is such a dear old house."

"It is charming," said the little girl with her distinct emphatic enunciation. "Quite charming—just the kind of house you ought to have. Are those your brothers standing at the door? What a sweet old porch—how ecclesiastical it all looks!"

Eric came bounding up to take Polly. For a moment he had fancied it was Nell who was riding with me. His face changed when he saw a stranger.

"Lady Clare, this is my brother Eric," I said, feeling pleased to have caught so neatly this democratic brother of mine.

Her little ladyship graciously inclined her head, and Eric took off his cap, with the air that makes Nell call him the Spanish cavalier.

"Won't you stop and just have one cup of tea with us and walk round the garden?" I asked. "I should like to show you one or two things, and nobody is expecting you back."

Lady Clare hesitated, seemed half inclined to decline, yet the child's natural curiosity and love of

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change was evidently awaking in her, and after a little pause she said:

"Well, as you are so very kind I think I will. It would be a great pleasure."

I signed to Eric to help her to dismount, which he did at once, though the colour mounted high in his face. Little Hugh had already led the willing Polly off to the stable, and the smart groom took charge of his young mistress's horse. Lady Clare thanked Eric for his attention with a slight smile, and as we walked together into the house she said in her stately little way:

"You are the clever brother, are you not?"

"No," answered Eric; "that is my brother, Marmaduke, who is at Oxford. He is the clever one."

"And what are you then—the genius?"

Eric's head went up very high.

"Genius forsook this degenerate land some time in the last century. There is no such thing as genius now."

"What, not your favourite Mill?" I asked.

'Well, possibly he may rank as an exception—but he is dead. Times like these are not worthy of genius, so I suppose it is withheld from us."

Little Lady Clare listened very gravely.

"Are you a pessimist?" she asked, looking straight

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at him with a suddenly awakened interest, and a comprehension I hardly expected.

"He is just now," I answered laughing; "but sometimes he is an optimist by way of a change. It all depends upon the stratum in which he is burrowing. We call him the family chameleon. He is always changing his colour."

"You don't understand," muttered Eric, who, however, always took our teasing in very good part. My little companion looked quickly at him, her deep violet eyes expressing a world of eager sympathy and comprehension.

"I understand," she said softly. "At least if I do not understand, I can feel. My father used to talk as you do. People called him a pessimist. I don't quite know what that is; but if you are one I shall be your friend. Anyone who thinks like my father must be my friend."

Eric coloured to the roots of his hair, remembering, perhaps, his words of a few days back; but there was something in the strange wistfulness of the child's eager manner that quite prevented a rebuff. Half unconscious of her loneliness, she was yet so very much alone that it was impossible not to pity her, and to meet any advance in an ungracious fashion would be quite out of Eric's power.

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"Your ladyship does me great honour," he said in as stately a way as heart could wish, and she bent her head in acknowledgment with an air as polished as his own.

We showed our guest round the garden, the quaint antiquity of which greatly pleased her. The old house with its oddly-shaped rooms, low ceilings, and uneven floors took her fancy likewise; I think the home-like air of everything touched a chord in the lonely little heart, for once or twice, I was almost sure, I caught a sparkle of tears in the earnest eyes.

We gave her a cup of tea in the dining-room, where the substantial school-room tea for those who did not dine was always held. Nell and Trixie had not yet returned from their walk, but Hugh came in and chattered away to Lady Clare as if he had known her all his life, and Eric waited on her with courteous assiduity, and watched her and listened to her in silence.

She soon rose to go, thanked me for my kindness, and hoped I should soon come to see her at Deerhurst; then turning to Eric, who had got his cap ready to accompany her to the door, she added:

"Perhaps if you can spare time on Saturday afternoon you will bring your sister across. I think there are some things at Deerhurst that would interest you."

Eric bowed, but returned no definite answer. He,

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however, attended her to the door, and put her on her horse with the skill and address of which, through long practice, he was master; and he walked beside her to the gate, and opened it for her with as much deference as if she had been a little princess and he a full-blown cavalier, instead of the red-hot republican he professed himself just now. Eric's manners had always been particularly good from his childhood upwards. He did not seem able to help being polite and courteous to everybody, even beyond what was expected of a school-boy, however much he might inveigh in private against tyrant custom and the absurdities of the modern social code. However, as I was pleased that he had behaved himself properly, I did not even smile when he came back, but only said:

"Poor little Lady Clare! I hope you did not mind my bringing her in unawares; but she seemed to wish it, though I think she hardly knew she did. She is very lonely; but she does not understand that she is, and is unhappy without knowing why."

"It must be dull in that big house all alone, I should think," said Eric. "She did not seem a bad sort of little girl at all. She didn't give herself the airs of an aristocrat."

"I don't know about that," I answered laughing. "I think you both gave yourselves those airs pretty

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well—unless, indeed, they are so natural that they don't count as airs."

Eric laughed a little himself, colouring up as he did so.

"It's an awful nuisance," he remarked, attacking the home-made cake with great vigour, "that one can't get over one's hereditary instincts, however clear one's convictions may be. I know exactly what I *think* on all these vexed social problems; but what I *feel* is quite another thing. I don't seem to have any control over my feelings; and of course I go and make a fool of myself, and everybody jibes and jeers. All the same I'm not such a mass of inconsistencies as you think."

"I never thought you anything of the kind, and I shall think it still less if you will go with me to Deerhurst on Saturday."

Eric would make no promise, but I fancied that he meant to come; and sure enough when the day arrived he was ready to escort me across. Even Trixie's innocent inquiry as to whether "he was going to be a tuft-hunter too?" did not deter him. Trixie evidently believed tuft-hunting to be an expression synonymous with visiting at the Park.

Her little ladyship received us very graciously. It was a lovely afternoon early in March, and the air

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was as soft and mild as if there were no such thing as treacherous east wind to come to nip us up. We spent a good deal of time wandering round the gardens and looking at the flowers in the hot-houses. Eric was very fond of botany, and knew a great deal about plants, and little Lady Clare was very much interested and asked many questions.

She evidently fancied him very clever indeed, and referred to him as if he must know all about everything; and though Eric is not at all vain, yet it is always pleasant to be admired and looked up to, and he could not help being gratified by the notice little Lady Clare took of him.

When we went indoors it was much the same. She showed him the armour on the walls, and expected him to identify the period in which it had been made, which he often did; and she showed him the books in the library, and was pleased at his comprehension and delight. She told us stories of the ancestors whose portraits hung upon the wall, and Eric could often cap her stories with others from his stores of information. Sometimes they grew grave and speculative over their talk, but more often it was cheerful and bright. I enjoyed listening to them, and seeing Lady Clare more happy and childlike than I had ever known her before. Madame Delaine thanked me in her

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broken English for coming so often to visit her little charge. It did her ladyship great good to see fresh faces and to make suitable friendships, she said.

But she ended up by telling me that Lady Tewksbury was expected home very shortly, when the responsibility with regard to little Lady Clare would be taken off her hands.

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CHAPTER V.

THE FAMILY FEUD.

NELL had never been to Deerhurst yet, nor could I get her to take much interest in the lonely little girl so near her in age. But I begged her, as a favour, to come with me when I went to call on Lady Tewksbury a few days after her arrival, for I had always felt half afraid of the stately dowager, and Nell, although in some ways more quiet and retiring than any of us, was never really afraid of anybody.

She consented to go with me after a little persuasion, and accordingly one bright, cold, dry day we sallied across the park together.

Lady Tewksbury received us in the large drawing-room. She had aged a good deal since last I had seen her, and her deep mourning had the effect of making her look yet more old and stately. There were lines in her face that had not been there a few years ago, lines of sorrow and pain and, as it seemed to me, of passion too. Lady Tewksbury was a handsome woman

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still, despite her years; but there was none of the tender softness and sweetness that makes some old faces so beautiful. I felt that one might respect and venerate and admire the owner of such a face, but that it would be difficult to *love* her.

She rose when we were announced, and took both of my hands in hers, looking at me very steadily.

"Little Magdalen Melville grown to be a woman! How time does fly! I am much obliged to you, my dear, for answering my letter in so practical a way." Then turning to Nell, she added: "I need not ask who this is. Do you know that you are the very image of your mother?" and to my surprise her face softened in a strange way, and she kissed Nell gently and tenderly, as if in memory of a departed friend.

After we had talked a few minutes on general topics, little Lady Clare came softly in, and then somehow—I hardly know how—Nell was left by the fire talking to Lady Tewksbury, and I was drawn off to the oriel window by my little new friend.

"You are pleased to have your grandmother home again?" I said.

An expression, the meaning of which I could not quite read, flitted across the child's face. I had noted a little change in her manner to-day. She looked more like the lonely little Lady Clare I had first seen

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asleep with her dogs, than the more childlike creature she had been latterly.

"I do not know," she answered in her quick way. "Yes, I am pleased for most things. Grandmother and I understand one another. We think the same and feel the same; but somehow having her here, and hearing all about it, brings it all home again. I don't know if I can explain it quite—but all the pain has come back. I think I had begun to forget a little—and now I never forget."

"Forget what?" I asked.

She gave her head a little impatient shake.

"Everything—everything—don't you understand? Our property has gone—gone over to strangers and enemies; they are living there, using our things, desecrating our home—lording it over the place where we have reigned so long. You can't tell what it is like to us, how we sit and talk and think, till it seems as if I *couldn't* bear it. Ah! why could I not have it all? Why are laws always so unfair to women? If I had only been a man!" She set her little teeth and clenched her hands. A sparkle like that of angry tears glittered for a moment in her eyes.

"But why do you talk of it and think of it so much if it makes you unhappy? Wouldn't it be wiser to try and forget?"

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"As if one could!"

"But you said just now that you had begun to do so at first, and that you had been happier for it."

Lady Clare was silent for a moment, looking away out of the window. The little face in its frame of golden hair grew strangely hard and fierce.

"You don't understand," she said. "I don't really want to forget—I *won't* forget. I wish to go on hating them the same always."

"Lady Clare," I could not help saying very gravely, "I think that is very wrong."

"I knew you would—but *I* don't."

"It is very wrong, whether you will admit it or not. How can you say the Lord's Prayer every day, if you are determined to go on hating people who have never really injured you?"

The little face was still hard and set.

"I can say it very well. I say 'forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors'—that's just as much in the Bible as the other. I haven't any debtors to forgive."

"That is only an equivocation, Lady Clare," I said. "Playing with the letter and trifling with the spirit of the words. I should have thought you were too sincere to pretend like that."

She shot a glance at me, half angry, half pleading.

"You don't understand," she said again. "You were

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never tried. You don't know what it is to have an enemy."

"Perhaps not, dear; but that is no reason why anger should be right. We are bidden to forgive our enemies as Christ forgave His."

"I know; but one can't do everything one is told to do in the Bible. We are told to be perfect like God, but nobody can be. I try in lots of ways to be good; but I won't try in this."

She spoke with too much determined vehemence for me to attempt to argue the point farther. After all, what good do such arguments do? Perhaps it is right to make a protest; but people are so seldom moved from their opinion by any spoken words. Even if they seem convinced at the time, they often go back again to their old belief. Perhaps if we could *show* more Christianity in our lives instead of only talking it, we should have a better chance of success.

Some other callers came then, county people from a distance, whom we only just knew; so very soon Nell and I went away. Little Lady Clare came with us as far as the door, which was quite a long way from the fire, round which the visitors had congregated.

"You're not angry with me?" she said as she held

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my hand in hers a moment, and there was something so touching in the way she said it that I stooped down to kiss her.

"Of course I am not angry," I answered; "and I hope some day things will all come right again."

She shook her head at that; but she smiled too, and looked more like herself.

"Come again soon," she said, "and bring Eric with you. I want to introduce him to Grandmother."

Nell smiled as we passed out into the sunshine together.

"Poor Eric! Fancy his consternation at being patronised by a dowager-countess!" and then we both laughed, knowing that Eric would behave himself properly in whatever society he might be.

"What did you mean by saying that you hoped things would come right?" asked Nell as we pursued our way together.

"Well, I don't quite know. I meant that I hoped things would seem better presently. You know just now they are so very much displeased because the St. Maur property has all had to pass to relations they do not like."

'I know," answered Nell quickly; "Lady Tewksbury was telling me about it. I call it a horrid shame! No wonder they are angry!"

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My sister spoke with more vehemence than was usual with her, and I felt half surprised.

"You made friends with Lady Tewksbury, then? Did you like her?"

"Yes, I did. She is the kind of woman I do like. She means what she says, and says what she means. I like people who do not mince matters. I don't know why she talked to me as freely as she did. I think she began because I was like Mother, and it seemed natural to talk of what was so much on her mind, and afterwards she went on because she saw I was interested, and that I felt just as she did."

"What did she talk about?"

"Why, about Castle St. Maur—the family place, and the horrid upstarts who have just taken possession of it."

"Have they really come, then?"

"Young Lord Tewksbury has not. He is a minor —at school or something, I believe. His guardian came to arrange matters with Lady Tewksbury. He must have been a horrid creature, and it was all the worse because he sheltered himself behind his duty to his ward in all his grasping ways. Of course Lady Tewksbury did not go into details, but I am sure he behaved abominably. I can see it in every word she speaks and in every look in her eyes. Horrid upstarts!"

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"They are St. Maurs though, Nell," I objected; "one can hardly speak of them as upstarts."

"I don't care. They have disgraced themselves by low marriages and by dabbling in trade, and by all sorts of disgusting things." Nell was evidently ready to out-herod Herod in her first burst of sympathy and indignation. "They to have the title and estates indeed! I think it would have been easier if they had *not* been St. Maurs."

I was rather of that opinion myself; but it was not a question on which I cared to argue much.

"It seems all very sad and miserable. I do so hate family quarrels, and old feuds without any real meaning. It seems so unchristian and purposeless. I hope some day it will be all made up."

But Nell shook her head resolutely. She did not think it ever could.

It was not very long before Lady Tewksbury returned our call. I was alone when she came, and she soon began to talk to me about her granddaughter, of whom she was evidently very fond.

She thanked me again for having conquered the first difficulties of an acquaintance begun under exceptional circumstances, and spoke with pleasure of the friendship already established between us.

"Clare does not take readily to strangers," she said.

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"I have never been able to induce her to make a little circle of intimates, as other children do; but she has taken a fancy to you and to your brother Eric. Your next sister, the one about her own age—the one so like your mother—she does not seem to care for in the same way. She is always capricious in her fancies; one can never account for them."

Nell had been to Deerhurst with Father two days ago, when he had paid his respects to Lady Tewksbury. I had gathered from my sister that she and little Lady Clare had not exactly got on together. The only point on which they had been at one was in the cordial detestation both felt for the upstart Lord Tewksbury. I was sorry to hear that the subject had been broached, and hinted to Nell that it was better avoided; but she gave me one of her wondering glances, and said:

"What is the good of keeping quiet when everyone knows what you are thinking? I like to speak out, and to hear other people speak out too. It is much more honest than keeping it all in, so that nobody knows what it is you really think."

"I want Clare to enjoy herself and to forget the past as far as possible," pursued Lady Tewksbury; and she went on to explain some of her ideas, which seemed to me rather strange.

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She evidently wanted the little girl to put away all the sad, serious thoughts raised in her mind by her father's death, and to be merry and happy, as if no loss had shadowed her life; but she did not seem to want her to forget the other grievance, or the dislike to the St. Maurs who had now taken the place of the older branch. Altogether it seemed to me sad and unnatural. I should have liked her to remember her father and talk of him, and think about him in the Home above, where he had joined the wife he loved so much. I think that would not have saddened her really, but have made her anxious to join them there some day. Then that wish might have led her to forget the foolish quarrel that had long been worn out and done with really; and learning to forgive and forget would have brought her nearer to her dead parents, who, as I began to find out, had regretted the family feud themselves, and had always intended to bring about a reconciliation when the young heir should come of age.

Death had frustrated this object, and Lady Tewksbury only alluded to it as a sort of weakness unworthy of a son of hers. She told me, with a scornful inflexion in her voice (which Lady Clare could imitate to a nicety), that the guardian of the present Lord Tewksbury had plainly advocated the policy of reconciliation, and had

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actually suggested that when his ward came of age, the festivities at Castle St. Maur should be graced by the presence of Lady Clare and the dowager-countess. I suppose I had no "proper pride," as Nell sometimes calls it, for I could not help thinking that this would be a very nice arrangement; but Lady Tewksbury spoke of it as if it had been an actual insult to her, and said she had never even mentioned the proposition to her granddaughter.

She then went on to say that she hoped we would all come to tea at Deerhurst the following Saturday afternoon, as it seemed as if we were the only companions with whom Clare would consent to associate. The two little Conways, though only two years her junior, she looked upon as mere babies, and the Haywards were out of the question, of course. I was pleased at the general invitation; for Hugh and Trixie were eager to see Deerhurst, now that they heard so much about it. I promised to do all I could to cheer up little Lady Clare, and Lady Tewksbury kissed me when she went away, and said she was pleased that the child should have a friend like me. I thought it was kind of her to tell me this, and it made it easier for me to go to Deerhurst whenever I could find time to do so.

The invitation for Saturday gave much satisfaction

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at home. Trixie and Hugh were unfeignedly delighted. Eric pretended he didn't care about it, but would go for the sake of getting another glance at the armour and the books. Nell said nothing. I don't know whether she was pleased or not, but she made no attempt to get out of the invitation. I think she, too, was a little fascinated by Deerhurst.

When Saturday came, it proved to be one of those very hot days we sometimes get at the end of March, which seem like summer come before its time. When we reached Deerhurst about four o'clock, we found tea awaiting us in the great yew arbour at the end of the terrace, where Lady Clare sat ready to welcome us.

It was a very nice tea, and the children helped to make things easy by their merry chatter. Our little hostess seemed to take a fancy to Trixie, and laughed a good deal at the remarks she made and the questions she asked. She was amused, too, at the sort of cross-fire of wits that was often exchanged between Eric and Nell. She had never known what it was to be one of a family, and these wordy battles were quite new to her.

Lady Tewksbury came out to us presently and said a few gracious things; but she did not stay long, as her presence was a visible restraint upon the children, and the laughing and talking died into silence at her approach.

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After tea the children begged me to take them round the garden and show them everything, and as Eric was deep in a discussion with Lady Clare, and Nell absorbed in listening, our departure was not noticed, and I was able to give myself up to the amusement of the two little ones. We knew that Lady Tewksbury had gone out driving by this time, so I felt at liberty to take the children indoors and show them some of the big rooms, and the pictures; and leaving them at last at play with the dogs on the lawn, I returned leisurely to the others, who still remained in the yew arbour.

This time I came up from the further side, and they were in such very deep discussion that I could not help pausing to listen, wondering what it could all be about. It was Eric's voice I heard speaking as I approached.

"I don't care—that has nothing to do with it. I am talking simply as a rational human being. The whole thing is a mere accident of birth. He can no more help being Lord Tewksbury, and inheriting, under the existing laws, your father's property, than you can help being Lady Clare St. Maur, incompetent to succeed to the title. It's not the fault of the man, but of the law of primogeniture and entail. Sweep away all these time-honoured abuses, and you would

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see that your grievance vanished with them. You are a radical and a republican at heart, Lady Clare, like myself. It is the injustice of existing institutions that makes your blood boil."

"It isn't!" answered Lady Clare hotly, "and I am nothing of the kind. I hate the very sound of the words. We have been royalists and loyalists and Tories ever since we have been a race. It is *they*, the interlopers, the usurpers, who have been traitors, radicals, revolutionaries—whatever you like to call them—*canaille!*" The scorn with which the last word was uttered baffles description. "Faugh! it sickens me to think of them! It is *that* which makes it so doubly bitter to see them where they are now."

"Lady Clare," said Eric, in his cool, convincing manner, "you are terribly, egregiously illogical, but as you are a woman I suppose you cannot help that. If you really uphold all the traditions of your forefathers, if you support the laws they have made for the preservation of landed estates and the glory of the title that goes with them, your antagonism to the present earl is simply a piece of most irrational folly. He cannot help his birth—it is an accident over which he has no control,—and as you have no personal grudge against him, your case has not a leg to stand upon. He has a clear right to his title, and he

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can't help being Lord Tewksbury any more than your father could before him. If anything is at fault, it is the law of the land, which you say you uphold with all your might. If this be so, what on earth is your grievance with this boy, the present head of the house? Until you can prove that he is personally unworthy, you have no right to speak of him with contempt. From my standpoint you have no right, because all men are born equal, and can never justly be despised except for some act of their own. From your own point of view you have equally no right to despise him, for he comes of the ancient race of St. Maur, and has your own blood in his veins—if that is any recommendation. In common justice you have no case whatever against him until you can prove that he is personally unworthy. To hate and despise him because he is Lord Tewksbury—made so by the very laws you uphold through thick and thin, is a piece of inconsequent absurdity that only a woman could stand to."

And Eric, who had a decided gift of oratory, brought his harangue to a close, waiting as it seemed for an answer to his arguments.

Lady Clare remained perfectly silent, but Nell broke out with some heat:

"You don't understand, Eric! You have no feel-

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ings—no imagination. Nothing appeals to you but logical argument and proof. These are not things to be argued about, but to be felt. I understand what Lady Clare means, and I say she is perfectly right."

"Unluckily your saying so won't make it right," was Eric's quiet answer. "Everybody has a right to his own opinions and his own feelings. Only if one is determined to be governed by an irrational prejudice one may just as well know it for what it is, and not think it something very grand and fine."

I thought perhaps I had better show myself now, and put an end to Eric's eloquence. I was not sorry that he had spoken out, and argued the question from a man's common sense point of view. Perhaps that might really appeal to Lady Clare's reason better than any argument of mine based on the ground of Christian charity. She was very silent all the rest of our stay, and only played the hostess with effort. We left in good time, and were not pressed to stay. I did not think she was angry, but I was sure she wished to be alone.

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CHAPTER VI.

ERIC'S BIRTHDAY.

"I AM not sure that I like those people, Grandmother," said little Lady Clare.

"What people, my dear?"

"Those Melvilles."

"Indeed. I fancied you were inclined to be friendly with them. They seem to me well brought up, well-mannered children."

"That may be; but I am not sure that I like them. Sometimes I think they are inclined to be presuming."

"Indeed! I should not have expected that. Which of them has offended you?"

"I did not say I was offended."

"Your words imply it."

"Well, perhaps they do. Perhaps I had better tell you all. I was vexed with Eric to-day. He talked about our feud, and made it sound ridiculous—as if we were in the wrong. I couldn't answer him, and it made me angry."

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Lady Tewksbury drew herself up with an air of offended dignity.

"Very impertinent of the boy to make any allusion to the matter."

"No, it wasn't that, Grandmother," answered Lady Clare, her sense of justice rising within her. "He didn't begin about it. Nell and I were talking, and he wouldn't say a word, and that made me ask him what he thought, for he seemed such a nice boy, and I felt sure he would be on my side. And then I found he wasn't, and he said all kinds of things about it, and I didn't know how to answer him back. He said it was the fault of the law, and that Lord Tewksbury could not help it any more than we could. He made it sound ridiculous to be angry with him."

"Children do not understand all the issues involved in such questions," answered Lady Tewksbury with dignity. "It is absurd for them to set themselves up as judges."

Clare felt and looked relieved.

"Then it is right to be angry, Grandmother?"

"It is impossible to avoid it under certain conditions."

"Magdalen thinks it wrong to cherish dislike because—because—well, you know she is a clergyman's daughter, and she does not think it right.

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Eric didn't talk like that. He made it out on other grounds. I'm quite puzzled. I do so hate to feel in the wrong about anything."

Lady Tewksbury's face was cold and stern. She evidently was not pleased at the tone the talk had taken. (Clare told me all this afterwards, just as I write it down now.)

"You had better dismiss the subject from your mind, my dear, and not discuss it any more with your friends. It is not likely that they can understand it, and it is not a question that can be set at rest by a few finely turned phrases, or a few moral axioms."

Clare was silent for awhile—silent but not satisfied. She wanted to argue the whole subject out, and satisfy herself that she was altogether in the right. She detested half truths or compromises. She wanted to go at once to the root of the matter; but it was useless to persist in anything against Lady Tewksbury's wishes.

"Grandmother," said Clare presently, "the tenth of April is Eric's birthday."

"Indeed."

"And he always has a sort of boys' party to tea in the garden, or in the summer-house if it is wet or cold."

"Ah, indeed!"

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"Grandmother," said Clare more coaxingly, "I never was at a boys' party in my life."

"No, my dear; I don't suppose you were."

"I should so like to go and see what it is like. Boys amuse me more than girls, I think."

Lady Tewksbury smiled a little, and seemed to reflect.

"Girls are not generally asked to boys' parties, are they?"

"I don't know; but of course at the Melvilles' there are girls as well—his sisters, you know. He said that if he dared he should send an invitation to me and Cortès and Fib. He talked about knowing court etiquette too well to venture upon such a step unauthorized. I wanted to say then how much I should like to go; but I didn't like to until I had asked you."

"Quite right, my love. Well, I will think it over. I am always anxious for you to enjoy life as much as possible. I do not suppose you would meet any undesirable people at Dr. Melville's."

As for Eric, he went home in rather bad spirits, and Nell said some cutting things about his want of proper feeling and regard for that of others. Lady Clare would never forget his rudeness, or forgive his plain speaking. It was a great pity, she concluded, that his foolish crazes led him to such extremes.

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Eric did not defend himself with his usual vigour. He asserted that he had only spoken the bare truth; but he admitted that perhaps it had not been quite wise to "talk so big," and he was evidently of Nell's opinion that he had "done for himself" with Lady Clare for good and all.

"You ought to be sincerely glad of that," concluded Nell, triumphantly, "as she is one of your hated aristocrats."

But Eric did not seem as elated as he should have been, nor did he enter with his usual gusto into the arrangements for his birthday party now drawing near.

For two days he was very silent, but on the third the sunshine all came back again. He received by the post a dainty-looking letter (with a deep black edge and the St. Maur coat of arms, stamped in black), addressed to him in a pretty childish hand.

He opened and read it, his face flushing as he did so, and then he handed it to me.

"Lady Clare St. Maur wishes to intimate to Mr. Eric Melville that it will afford much pleasure to her and her suite to be present at the festivities shortly to be held in honour of his birthday, if he will be pleased to invite her to share them."

I could not help laughing over the terms in which

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the letter was couched; but I was very much pleased for Eric's sake that it had come, for I knew he had been afraid that he had been uncourteous and rude the day he had been at Deerhurst, and had felt troubled to think of a possible coldness between us and Lady Clare. Now, however, this fear was at an end, and he at once became eagerly absorbed in preparations for the coming fête.

Indeed for the whole of the next fortnight we hardly saw him. He was immensely busy over some scheme; and all we knew was that he had got Father to give him sole possession of a big barn, temporarily empty, and that he and Frank Conway, and sometimes the Hayward boys, were busy there all the evening, and the whole of their half-holidays.

Something was evidently in preparation, but none of us girls were let into the secret. Hugh evidently knew all about it, and was as busy as Eric himself; but he kept his own counsel, and we learned nothing from him.

I was petitioned to have an unusually good tea in honour of the occasion, and was quite ready to stretch my prerogative to the utmost. As the boys were evidently preparing some surprise for us, we thought the least we could do was to do the same for them; and Nell and I turned cooks ourselves for the occasion, and prepared such regal fare in the way of cakes and

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tarts and savoury meats, that it was a question if even a dozen hungry boys would be able to make away with them all.

We hardly saw little Lady Clare all this time except in church, for she had begun her studies again under Madame Delaine, and was not mistress of her time; and we were busy too, and had the bad luck to find her out when we did manage to walk over to Deerhurst. She did not come to see us all that fortnight. I fancy she felt a little shy, though I could not exactly explain why; but she was to be with us for Eric's birthday party, that was quite settled, and we knew from this that she was not really offended with any of us.

The important day came at last, not too bright at first, but improving steadily as the hours went by. At three o'clock it was as warm and pleasant as possible, and our guests began to arive with praiseworthy punctuality.

Generally the party had been exclusively for boys, though we were graciously allowed to appear and to wait upon their lordships at tea; but this year "a few selected sisters" in Eric's phraseology, had been invited to meet Lady Clare, and altogether we mustered some twenty strong when at last her little ladyship arrived.

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Eric always did the honours at his own party, and it was he who handed Lady Clare from her carriage, and introduced her with some show of ceremony to the assembled guests. She saluted them generally with self-possessed grace, spoke a few words to us, and finally let Eric lead her round the garden, where one or two triumphal arches had been erected in honour of the occasion.

Presently her little ladyship took from her pocket a small packet, and held it out to Eric.

"I wish you many happy returns of the day," she said; "and I hope you will accept this little remembrance from me."

"You are very good," said Eric taking the packet and breaking the seal. "May I look to see what it is?"

"Yes, I should like you to do so."

When the paper was removed a little morocco case was revealed, rather faded in colour, but carefully preserved. Inside was a curious bronze ornament, half cross, half medal, with an inscription on it, and a man's head.

Eric looked up inquiringly.

"What is it?" he asked. "It looks very old."

"It is old. It is a family relic. It has been a long time in our family. It is a sort of decoration that was once given to one of my ancestors."

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"But don't you want to keep it yourself?"

"No," she answered. "I want to give it to you. It was given by some prince to one of our family, because he was brave enough to speak the truth to him when his own people dared not do so, and so save him from a disastrous war. Papa once told me the whole story, when he gave me the medal. He said it was an episode in the unwritten history that has made up so much of the world's destiny. I'm afraid I've forgotten a great deal, and Grandmother doesn't know anything about it, and doesn't value the medal. But I know it was really given for speaking the truth, and not being afraid of the prince's anger (for he was angry at first, and only found out by degrees how wise the advice had been). And I want to give it to you. I should like to decorate you with it myself."

Eric's face glowed, but he submitted to her will, and when we next saw him it was with this odd-looking decoration fastened upon his jacket.

"Lady Clare gave it me for a birthday present; it is old and curious," was all his explanation at the time; it was afterwards from the little girl that I heard the rest.

"I don't know if he understood what I meant," she concluded; "but I do like people who speak

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the truth out boldly, whether I agree with them or not."

We had tea early, out on the lawn. I always find it best to set people to eat as quickly as possible. Things go so much better when once the feeding has begun. Besides Eric had whispered that he wanted the tea in good time, as he had a surprise in store for us afterwards.

Towards the conclusion of the repast several of the boys began slipping silently away, one after the other. About eight had vanished in this mysterious fashion, when Eric came round to me and said in a whisper:

"I must go now; just keep them amused for about five minutes longer, and then bring them to the barn. You will find seats all ready."

He ran off himself then, and when the specified time was up, I led the way, with little Lady Clare, to the barn.

What was the delight of the assembled guests to find it fitted up, really very cleverly, as a sort of miniature theatre. There were seats covered with shawls or cushions for the audience. A little throne was in the middle for our honoured guest, Lady Clare, whilst a curtain hung from a great centre beam, and beneath a raised stage was a row of cleverly contrived foot-lights. A buzz of applause arose as we filed in and took our

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seats. There was a good deal of whispering and giggling behind the curtain, but not enough to destroy the illusion, and we waited with immense pleasure and expectancy for what was to come.

When the curtain at length went up (or rather divided down the middle—to be drawn back with some difficulty and irregularity) we beheld a sort of dark forest scene roughly painted on canvas, and to the right a wonderful erection, evidently meant to represent a castle. At an opening, evidently a window, sat a beautiful maiden—our programmes told us that the Lady Clarinda was a beautiful maiden, deprived of her lands and rights by hostile kinsmen—leaning her head on her hand and sighing over her hard fate. The maiden was represented by Frank Conway, who was dressed in flowing white garments, with a veil about his head, and who really did look very girlish with his painted complexion and carefully adjusted robes.

Presently entered Eric, in a fine cavalier dress, with a guitar at his side, and Hugh in attendance as a page. He looked up to the window, from which the lady had withdrawn at his approach, and, twanging away at the one string of his instrument, began an impassioned love song. This soon brought the Lady Clarinda back, and then came some very fine talking, in which her lover vowed to set her free and restore her to her

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rights, or to perish in the attempt. The lady implored him not to risk his valuable life in so hopeless an attempt, but the cavalier would not listen to these entreaties. Life was valueless to him whilst she lay pining far away from her ancestral home. Then all of a sudden out rushed a tousled old man, in a tow wig and a dressing-gown (described in the programme as an "infuriated guardian") demanding in hoarse accents of rage who it was daring to hold treasonable conversation with his ward. Sir Lancelot del Castello hurled defiance back at him, whereupon he blew a horn and summoned other hostile kinsmen, who all rushed upon the gallant Sir Lancelot and his page, whilst the lady above screamed and fainted, and the curtain went down upon a general mêlée.

We applauded vigorously, and brought all the actors up before the curtain to make their bow, and the infuriated guardian remained behind to explain to the audience that in default of fresh scenery he must appeal to our kind indulgence, and ask us to imagine the next scene to represent a dungeon in the castle.

That point being gladly accorded, we were not kept waiting much longer before the dungeon scene was revealed. Sir Lancelot was the captive, loaded with chains, sitting on the ground in an attitude of deep dejection. Of course, whilst he was in the midst of

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his despair, in comes the beautiful maiden with the jailor's keys and the knight's sword. She has come to release him and his page, she tells him, and proceeds to unfasten his chains; but in her dejected mien he reads fresh trouble, and at last she confesses that upon the morrow she is to be forced into a marriage with one of those aforenamed detested kinsmen. At that Sir Lancelot springs up, vowing that it shall never, never be. After a certain amount of bashful hesitancy, the maiden consents to fly with him, and once let her be beyond their power as his wedded wife, he will assemble his faithful vassals and win back for her her lands and her rights.

The curtain fell this time upon a rapturous love-scene, the lovers falling into each other's arms in true melodramatic style; but almost before we had done applauding it rose again for the grand finale.

The lovers were seen speeding through the forest, the lady mounted on the knight's snow-white charger (it was really the old donkey arrayed in a white holland horse-cloth, but the effect was excellent), he and his page in close attendance. They had hardly left the stage at one side, before the infuriated guardian and a band of hostile kinsmen entered from the other in hot pursuit. There was a good deal of very exciting dodging up and down the stage; but at last the

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pursuers, by dividing their forces, caught the unhappy lovers in a sort of trap, and further flight was impossible. Then the knight drew his good sword, his page did the same, and, placing themselves before the lady, they prepared to do battle for her against all the world. What an exciting battle it was, too! As soon as one hostile kinsman was struck down and fled howling away, he ran on again as a new one, until it seemed as if there were no end to their numbers. Some few lay stretched upon the ground dead or mortally wounded; but the infuriated guardian fought like a tiger, and fresh arrivals of kinsmen kept coming to his assistance. Their fighting, however, was not very scientific, and the knight and his trusty page hewed them down with the greatest ease, and without receiving so much as a scratch. At last, after a most exciting scene, the infuriated guardian flung down his club and announced himself beaten. All his supporters were dead. Not one hostile kinsman was left to defraud the Lady Clarinda of her rights. He was therefore ready to give his blessing to the lovers; and embracing them both with grotesque gestures of affection, he took them by the hands and led them to the footlights to receive the plaudits of the audience. The page and the snow-white charger followed, whilst the defunct kinsmen, transformed to Sir Lancelot's

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loyal vassals, broke into rapturous plaudits in honour of the betrothed lovers. We added our voices to theirs, and the curtain fell for the last time amid quite a tumult of applause.

Little Lady Clare had watched and listened with the greatest interest. Flushed and excited, she turned to me.

"Did Eric make up the play?" she asked.

I answered that I didn't know; but in my heart I thought it more than probable.

When the actors, still in costume, joined us on the lawn, her little ladyship insisted on having them all presented to her, and she thanked them, in her little queenly, gracious way, for the amusement they had given us. The Hayward boys, who knew her to be a star above their sphere, were much flattered; and as they had contributed most of the scenery and the dresses, it was fair that they should come in for some praise.

"But I believe you made the play," said Lady Clare to Eric, who sat next her at the supper-table an hour later.

He coloured, but disclaimed the authorship, saying they had all made it up together.

"It was very amusing," said her little ladyship. "Only I don't know if anyone would *really* like to have so many people killed."

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"In the days of chivalry they always killed off all the enemies," answered Eric with a touch of half unconscious satire. "In these degenerate days we only hate them. Perhaps, however, the real distinction is somewhat fine."

Lady Clare coloured slightly, and looked suddenly grave and thoughtful. Was she, too, thinking of some wise words in a wonderful Book that said: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer?" I could not tell; but I caught the shadow on her face, and saw that there was no vexation in it, only reflective gravity.

But the carriage had come to fetch her; and with many words of thanks for the pleasant afternoon spent with us, she took her departure. For us, I think, Eric's birthday party came to an end from that moment.

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CHAPTER VII.

EASTER VACATION.

TEN days later I was made perfectly happy by the return of Duke for the Easter vacation. He had always been my especial friend and confidant, and this year I felt as though I had more to talk to him about than ever.

I am not at all a good hand at writing letters. For one thing I have not much time, and for another I have not the happy knack of saying just what I want and no more, which is the secret of good letter-writing. So, although Duke knew that Lady Tewksbury and her granddaughter were living at Deerhurst, and that we saw a good deal of them, he did not know many of the details I have been relating, nor anything at all about the unfortunate family feud that seemed so very sad to me.

Pacing up and down the garden in the twilight that evening, I told Duke the whole history, to which he listened with great attention.

"A pity," he said; "it always seems a pity when two

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branches of a fine old family are at daggers drawn—a thousand pities to train up a child in those old traditions. Strange how worn-out prejudice clings to some natures."

He was thinking of Lady Tewksbury, I knew, and I came in a sort of way to her defence.

"In many ways she is so nice. She is most liberal in her gifts to the poor, and in her support of all parish charities. She is very clever too, and a most interesting cultivated woman. Father says so. He enjoys a talk with her almost more than anything else."

"Yes, yes; it is so often the case, I do not doubt it for a moment." Then, after a pause, Duke added thoughtfully, "Young Lord Tewksbury is at Oxford."

"Is he? Do you know him?"

"No, he is not in my college. He is a Christ Church man. I heard fellows saying that young St. Maur had come into the title, and was Lord Tewksbury now. I remembered the name of course, and your letters brought the subject back to my mind. But I don't know him personally."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Oh yes. He is always on the river. He is very anxious to get into the boat, they say. He is fond of all active exercises."

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"But what is he like?"

"Oh, a pleasant, good-looking chap; brown haired and well bronzed. He is quite young, not more than nineteen, I should say; in his first year; very popular, I believe, in his own set, and with plenty of money to throw about."

"I hope he is not fast," I said, so gravely that Duke laughed.

"You seem to take all the family under your special care, Magdalen. No, I don't think Tewksbury is fast at all. He seems a very nice lad by all accounts, and he has plenty of brains too. He reads very well, they say, for a first-year man, and a man who has not his own way to push in the world; and though he is very well-to-do and very well connected, there is not a bit of swagger about him. And I heard that he had been very generous, in a quiet way, to one or two poor students who were pinched in money matters. You see I was interested enough in the family, for your sake, to make some inquiries about him."

"I am glad you did; and I am glad he is nice. I had a sort of idea, from what I heard, that the St. Maurs on that side had sunk a good deal, and got to be quite common and under-bred."

Duke laughed a little.

"That is all a fiction on the part of the rival branch

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of the family. I remembered something of the old story, and took the trouble to ask. This youth is an only child and an orphan, but his connections are unexceptionable, not to say aristocratic, and his guardian is as proud of his St. Maur pedigree as Lady Tewksbury herself can be. If there have been any *mésalliances* in the junior branch of the family it must have been several generations back. At present they can boast as eligible a line of ancestors as anyone need wish. Not that it matters very much, as far as I see, so long as the people themselves are made of the right stuff."

"Lady Tewksbury would think it mattered a good deal," I said.

"Lady Tewksbury, by all accounts, is hardly likely ever to trouble her head over the matter."

I was silent. Even to Duke I hesitated for a moment to confide the vague purpose rising within me; but somehow I think he half divined it.

"I declare, Magdalen, I believe you have set your heart upon bringing about a reconciliation!"

I felt myself colour up to the roots of my hair. He laughed kindly and encouragingly.

"Well, one might do worse than heal a family feud. What is the idea?"

"I don't know that I have one," I answered; "only

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I can't bear people to live in that kind of enmity. I know the other St. Maur's are willing for a reconciliation. Something was said about a visit from Lady Tewksbury and Lady Clare when the new earl comes of age; but at present they wouldn't even hear of such a thing. Only if by degrees they could be told things about young Lord Tewksbury—things that would make them understand that he was not really so very different from themselves—don't you see what I mean, Duke? Don't you think that something might perhaps be done in that way? I should be so glad if it could."

Duke fell into a sort of reverie.

"Well, perhaps it could—there is no knowing. I will think about it at anyrate. Only don't be in a hurry, Magdalen, and don't show your hand too soon. Women so often spoil their own game with trying to precipitate matters; and then sometimes more harm than good comes of it."

I knew quite well what Duke meant, and that he was right. I promised to be very careful, and not mention the family feud or Lord Tewksbury of my own accord.

"That will be best, and don't be surprised if I am silent as well. Perhaps I shall not say a word all through this vacation; all the same, I will not forget what you have said."

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I thanked him, and tried not to feel disappointed. This was the easier as my confidence in Duke was great. Also I was beginning to learn the lesson, only taught by experience, that it is no good to try and hurry on matters faster than is natural.

The next day Duke suggested that I should take him across to Deerhurst, to pay his respects to the ladies there. We walked across the park, my favourite route, and learned that Lady Tewksbury was out, but that Lady Clare was at home and in her favourite vestibule-room.

I was intimate enough now to go in to her unannounced, and found her to-day much as I had done on the occasion of our first interview, sitting alone with her dogs, in an attitude of listless dejection. She was not asleep this time, however, and she rose up from her little throne quickly as we appeared. She had heard enough about Duke to welcome him almost like a friend. She was never shy, and her little stately ways were very graceful and becoming.

She looked unusually interesting and picturesque, I thought, seated upon her cushioned couch, over which a rich bearskin rug had been thrown. The sunlight slanting in, touched her golden hair and made it shine with a radiance of its own, which seemed all the brighter from the contrast it presented to her deep

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black dress. The dogs themselves made a picture Landseer would have loved to paint, grouped so lovingly around their little mistress; but the crowning touch to the interest of the scene—the touch that gave it a certain pathos not so easily described, was the shadow of trouble that rested on the girl's face and shone unmistakably out of her dark violet eyes. Some children would have betrayed their grief by tears or irritability, or by hiding away altogether; but little Lady Clare did none of these things. She sat facing us with quiet composure, talking to us in the self-restrained way characteristic of many of her moods. I did not even know if Duke would be aware that anything was amiss, or would see the shadow that rested on the pale face and lurked in the wistful eyes; but I think he saw almost as much as I did, for he presently asked leave to renew old acquaintance with the family pictures, and took himself off to the hall, leaving me and our little hostess alone together.

We were silent then for a few minutes, and then I got up and crossed over towards her.

"Little Lady Clare," I said (I often called her that still, although she had intimated her wish that I should now call her by her name without its title), "something is the matter."

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She bent her head, and a tear dropped on to the great head of Cortès that rested on her lap.

"Can I do anything to help you? Can you tell me what is the matter?"

The answer was rather long in coming, but it came quite clearly at last.

"I have been naughty," she said, "naughty to Grandmother; and I was trying so hard—so hard to be good—good to her and to everyone."

I sat down beside her, and put my arm round her. She laid her head on my shoulder and went on with her tale.

"I've been thinking a great deal lately," pursued Lady Clare gravely, "ever so much more than I ever thought before. Things look different somehow, and I want to be different, too. I want to be good—really good, like the people one reads about and sees sometimes. I can't tell you all I thought, but some of it was to be kind and friendly to everybody and not to be proud or self-assertive, which I often am, I know, though I don't think it's quite nice really. Well, when I was out yesterday I met all the Haywards near their own house, and I stopped to speak to them; you know I met them at Eric's birthday party, some of them at least. Then they asked me to come in and have some tea; for it was a hot day, and I had

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been riding fast and was very thirsty. I saw they would be pleased if I did, so I went with them, and they gave me tea, and took me all round their big farm, and I saw the cows milked and the chickens fed, and patted the little colts and enjoyed myself very much. Mrs. Hayward thanked me for coming as if it was quite a favour, and they all went with me to the gate and begged me to come again, and I said I would. Of course, I know they are not gentry, and they know it themselves and don't profess to be; but they are very kind, and their animals are very nice, and I always do like people who are good to animals, and really love them."

She paused a moment, and I said:

"I have known the Haywards all my life, and I know that there is a great deal to like in them; but they are not exactly what can be called cultivated or refined."

"No; but they do not profess to be. They only call themselves well-to-do farmers," answered Clare quickly. "It is just that that keeps them from being vulgar—no people are really vulgar if they only keep in their right place. Well, to go on. I found out I had stayed quite a long time, but I went home pleased because I had made people happy. I didn't say anything to Grandmother; but it wasn't because I

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had done anything I was ashamed of. I don't always say what I've been doing or where I have been, and Grandmother did not ask a single question. But she must have heard from the servants about it. I suppose the groom said something, and it got round to her maid, and she told Grandmother. Anyway, after lunch to-day, she spoke to me as she has never spoken in all her life before. She called me deceitful for not telling, and spoke of the Haywards as though it would contaminate me to know them. I got into a passion then—I don't often do that, but when I do I feel as if I could *kill* people—and I said every wicked thing I could think of. I told Grandmother that she was a wicked woman, that she tried to poison my mind against all the world, and make me as hard and as proud and as friendless as herself. I told her I knew she was all wrong, and that I knew a better set of laws than she had ever taught me. I mixed up things till bad seemed good, and good bad." The child pressed her hands over her eyes as if to try and clear her vision. "I was partly right in what I *meant*, but I was quite, quite wrong in what I *said;* and Grandmother spoke to me as she has never done before, and went away and left me alone. I am so miserable, Magdalen, for I was trying so hard to be good, and it seems all to end in being worse than before."

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I tried hard to comfort her. I tried to tell her a little about the right way to be good—about getting help and counsel, and not trying to do everything in just our own way. I do not think I am very clever at teaching people, but I believe Clare understood what I meant, for she clung to me and kissed me and said she would try. And she promised to beg Lady Tewksbury's pardon directly, and to try and remember that obedience comes among the first things to try after, and that consideration and kindness and a wish to please should always, like charity, begin at home.

I talked it all over with Duke as we went home, and we agreed that the poor little girl was in a difficult position. She had begun to wake up from her spoiled-child existence, and to recognize the responsibilities and deeper aims of life. But she had no sympathetic guide or teacher. There was a terrible stumbling-block in her way, and it seemed likely that she would trip and fall and lose her way many times before she found a path out of the maze. That sad family estrangement seemed a sort of bar standing in her way across the road she wished to tread. I did not quite know if she were aware of this herself, but I knew that she would never be able to feel the peace and comfort she was seeking after, unless all the

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cherished resentment and ill-will were driven out of the proud little heart.

The next time we saw Lady Clare, except in church on Good Friday, was on Easter Eve, when she came with lovely baskets of flowers, to help us in our task of decoration.

I was really too busy to talk to her, but I gave her a glance of sympathy, and received a quiet little smile that was meant, I think, to be reassuring. Duke, however, took her on his mind, and asked if she would help him to decorate the font. He told her I had given him that to do, but that he had very little notion how to set about it.

Lady Clare was pleased at being asked to help, and set about the task very willingly. Her flowers were lovely, and she had the correct eye, the faultless taste, and the quick, clever fingers that one would expect in one of her temperament. I cast a glance at the busy pair now and then, saw that a little flush had crept into the pale face, and that there was more of animation in the expressive eyes. The work progressed fast, and presently I saw that it was all accomplished, and that the fellow-workers were sitting together in the nearest pew and talking in low tones. I could not guess the subject of their conversation, but I could see the thoughtful shade gather on little Lady Clare's

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face, though at the same time I was sure she looked happier than she had done when she came in.

Duke did not tell me what they had talked about; he only said that she was an interesting child, with a very fine mind, sadly in want of more sympathetic training.

After that Duke and Clare were professed friends, and Lady Tewksbury was particularly gracious to him and to us all. I think she, too, had been sorry for the outbreak between herself and her little granddaughter, and was anxious to bring back some of the sunshine that seemed to have vanished from her face. Madame Delaine had gone away for her holidays, and the child was consequently more alone than ever, and it seemed as if we could not be too much at Deerhurst. Some of us went over almost every day, often by special invitation, and Clare came more to the rectory than she had ever done before.

She had been a little shy with us for a short time after the sudden burst of confidence into which she had been surprised; but one day, not long before the close of the vacation, she said once when we were alone together:

"I did apologize, Magdalen. I had never said I was sorry in my life before; but I did then, and it wasn't quite so hard as I expected. Grandmother has been

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kinder since. I sometimes think she understands better than I thought she did. If I dared to talk about those things again, perhaps I should find I had been wrong in some of the things I've thought. I don't think people as old as she is, think quite as we do. It's very hard to know what is right. But I see now that I must be obedient; and I ought not to have gone anywhere without Grandmother's leave. I don't suppose I shall ever be able to keep my promise of going there again—to the Haywards I mean. Do you think I might ask?"

"Yes, I think you might ask some day; but if the answer is 'No,' you must be prepared to abide by it, you know."

"Yes, of course; I understand that." Then presently she added, "I like your big brother Duke. I am sorry he is going back so soon. When will he come home again?"

"At the end of June; and then he will have quite a long time at home. It will be very nice. Does he tell you stories about Oxford?"

"Yes, they are very amusing. I like to hear all about it. He has to keep rules too, he says; very silly ones some are, like wearing his gown in the evenings always, and being in by a certain time. I thought grown-up men always did as they liked."

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"I don't think anyone ever gets old enough always to do that. I think it might be very bad for them if they could."

Clare looked suddenly thoughtful.

"Perhaps so," she said, and the subject dropped.

Duke went back to Oxford without once having named the subject of the present Lord Tewksbury to his relatives at Deerhurst; but I knew that he had not forgotten our mutual wish, and was satisfied that this reticence was for the best.

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CHAPTER VIII.

SUMMER DAYS.

AFTER the Easter vacation had ended, and Duke had gone back to Oxford, life went on very quietly with us for a while.

I was disappointed, however, on one point, for I had hoped that we should see more of little Lady Clare now that the days were long and warm, and plans for out-door pleasures might be safely laid; but almost as soon as May was fairly in, Lady Tewksbury announced her intention of taking her granddaughter on a round of visits to watering-places and to friends' houses. The child looked pale and grave she told me, and was getting into thoughtful unchildish ways. She wanted change of scene and new ideas. Deerhurst was too full of associations connected with the first days of her loss.

As for the child herself she was genuinely sorry to go. She said she liked Deerhurst very much, and that Grandmother did not understand. She did not explain what it was that was not understood, and I

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did not ask; but I had my own opinion about the cause of these moods of thoughtful gravity, and I did not think that they depressed Clare, or were bad for her. I was certain that she was happier in herself than she had been in bygone days when others had been more satisfied about her.

However she was taken away to enjoy herself, little as she relished the prospect. She was permitted to go with me to say good-bye to the Haywards, and this gave her great satisfaction, and was a cause of unbounded delight to that well-meaning but boisterous family. I was pleased to see that her little ladyship was quite able to recognize genuine warmth of heart and good feeling, veiled behind a somewhat rough exterior. Her "pretty ways," as Mrs. Hayward afterwards aptly described them, were immensely admired, and she became quite the idol of that household.

When on our way home I told her of the kindness the squire's wife had shown us on our mother's death, she looked up quickly, and said:

"Yes, I could fancy it—they are kind—all of them, and show it too. Sometimes I think it is a pity that we show things so little. It is nice sometimes to see that people care."

I knew what she meant. I often felt for her, poor child. She lived amongst those who had trained them-

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selves to a self-control and restraint of all emotion that could not but be a little oppressive to a really warm-hearted child. If she had had brothers and sisters of her own she would not have felt it, but little Lady Clare was so very lonely.

To Eric's great delight she left Cortès to his care. He was too big to be taken with them, and his little mistress was anxious to leave him with somebody who "understood him" and would be good to him. The hound had always evinced a partiality for Eric, and there was plenty of room in the outbuildings for him to live. We were all fond of animals, and Cortès was so well-trained that he was no annoyance indoors, and after a few days of great depression at his mistress's desertion, he settled down contentedly with us and followed Eric like a shadow.

Weeks passed by very quickly, and we soon began to look forward with a pleasant sense of anticipation to the long vacation, which would give us three months of Duke's society at home. Those months were always the brightest time of the year for me, and I looked forward to them with great impatience.

Duke wrote regularly to me during term-time, but he never mentioned Lord Tewksbury, or told me if he had made his acquaintance. Sometimes I felt inclined to ask, but when it came to the point I never did. I

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thought I had said enough, and had better leave things alone now.

About mid-summer day Lady Tewksbury and her granddaughter returned to Deerhurst, and I hastened to see them and welcome them back. The old lady looked all the better for her change, I thought, and was more animated and talkative than before. As for Clare, I did not see much difference in her. She still looked pale and thoughtful, though perfectly healthy and well, and I fancied that her smile had in it a little more of depth and sweetness, and her eyes a certain serenity that were new since I had seen her last.

Presently, whilst Nell listened with interest to Lady Tewksbury's stories about places and people she had seen (Nell was always eager for information, and interested in the talk of those older than herself), Clare drew me away towards the long windows opening upon the terrace, and presently we were wandering together amid the rose bushes and syringa that bordered the shady shrubbery.

"I am so glad to be home again," said little Lady Clare, passing her arm affectionately through mine, "and so glad to have you to talk to again."

I stooped and kissed her. It pleased me very much to hear her say so, because I knew that she was always perfectly sincere.

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"We are all so pleased to have you back. I felt quite guilty at not bringing Cortès with me to-day. He *will* be delighted to see you!"

"Ah, yes, dear Cortès; but I told Eric I wanted to take him by surprise. To-morrow I shall come over and claim him. I want to see what he does. Eric will be at home, won't he? as it is Saturday. It was so good of him taking him. I should have been so unhappy about him if he had been here all alone."

"Eric liked having him immensely; but tell me about yourself. How have you enjoyed yourself all these weeks?"

"Pretty well—sometimes I liked it very much, though I got tired of some of the places. I like home best, still it is pleasant sometimes to go away. I think Grandmother and I got to understand one another better when we were so much together, without Madame or the servants always coming in to interrupt."

I looked quickly at my little companion. Clare's eyes were bent upon the ground; but she went on speaking in the same quiet way.

"I understand Grandmother better than I did before, and I think she understands me. We think much more alike *really* than I thought, only—only there are a few things that looked different to us. Magdalen," she said suddenly, "I called her wicked once,

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but it was I who was wicked instead. She is kind and good I think, only when people get old it is *very* hard to change their ideas. I think I can understand that a little myself. But I think—I believe that by and by she will let me, if I wish, make up the feud."

"Really, Lady Clare?"

"I think so (don't call me 'lady' any more, please). I haven't exactly asked her; but I think so. You see we met some people who knew the other St. Maurs and Lord Tewksbury,"—the name was still spoken with a little effort—"and they said everything that was nice about him, and evidently could not make out why we didn't know him or visit at Castle St. Maur. After that, by and by, Grandmother told me that his guardian had once suggested that we should go there when he comes of age, and that we should be friends. I did not know it before."

"Well?" I asked curiously, "and does your grandmother mean to go?"

"No," answered Clare decidedly, "she does not intend to go herself; but she said that I might think it all carefully over—it is more than a year before it will happen—and if at the end of that time I really wished to make it up with them, she would find me a suitable escort and let me go. She said she had observed the way in which my wishes were tending, and

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if she found it no mere childish impulse, but a real conviction and wish on my part, she would not stand in the way of a reconciliation; although she should hardly be likely to change her own attitude towards the family she had always disapproved and disliked."

I listened with a good deal of interest to this recital, and was much pleased with what I heard.

"Are you not very glad?" I asked.

"I—I—am not quite sure."

"But I thought you really wanted yourself to do away with that family feud. You have never exactly said so, but I thought it."

"I thought it once myself," answered Clare in a very low tone, "but I am not quite so sure now."

"I don't quite understand."

"I am not sure that I do either. I will try to explain, and if you think me very wicked it is only what I think of myself. You know I began to think a good deal about being good and doing right and forgiving injuries, and being better altogether—I didn't talk much about it, but I thought a great deal. It seemed to me then that the old family quarrel was dreadfully wicked and very foolish, and as long as I didn't believe I should ever be allowed to make it up, I fancied I was very much against it, and very sorry it was allowed to go on. But the strange thing is, that as

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soon as Grandmother gave me leave—or almost leave —to do as I pleased about it, I began to wonder if I really *did* wish to make friends. All the old feelings about Castle St. Maur came back again and again, and I feel often as though I *wouldn't* and *couldn't* be friends with people who had taken what should be mine, and had turned me out like that. I don't know now what I really wish. Sometimes I think I shall just keep quiet and do nothing, and then I know what a hypocrite I have been, saying what I did about Grandmother and other people; and at other times I remember what papa wished, and I almost make up my mind to do what you would say was right, and I don't know how it will all end. I almost wish Grandmother would not let me judge for myself, but would decide for me herself. I understand much better how she feels than I ever did before."

I was very much interested by all this; and I thought I could understand a good deal my little friend's feelings. I was not going to advise her or to urge her to anything. I felt quite certain that her own sense of justice and the wish to do right would be her best guide as time went on.

"You must think it all over, dear," I said, "and try to do right. You have plenty of time before you, and you will be learning every day. Things that look

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hard at one time often grow easier and less puzzling as we grow older."

She looked at me quickly.

"I know what you think right. I know what you would do in my place."

"Perhaps you do; but it is your duty to do what *you* think right, whatever other people may say or do."

She sighed, and coloured a little, and presently began to talk of something else.

Next day came the meeting between her and Cortès, which was very pretty to watch, and the pleasant renewing of friendship with all the family. Eric was rather shy, but as devoted as ever to her ladyship's service, and Trixie filled up all pauses with her incessant chatter. Duke's approaching return was duly canvassed, and Clare expressed her pleasure at the thought of seeing him again.

Nell and Clare had never been intimate, but during the week that followed, which was a very busy one for me, owing to the jam-making and attendant fruit-picking, those two had mainly to depend upon each other for company, and one evening my sister surprised me by the remark:

"Has Clare talked to you about her new idea of making friends with the upstarts? I did think she had more spirit than that!"

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"I hope you don't say so to her, Nell," I said, and she looked straight at me in her grave way as she answered, "I always say what I think, you know, Magdalen."

"Then I wish you would try to think a little differently sometimes," I could not help answering. "What would father say if he thought your influence would be exerted to widen rather than to heal a family breach?"

Nell's look did not falter.

"I do not think that all quarrels are wrong, or even a mistake. The whole history of the world shows that they have a distinct value of their own. Even the Bible does not advocate peace under all circumstances, as so many excellent people do."

"Possibly not, but an old worn-out grudge like this, without a shade of present meaning, ought to be allowed to drop into oblivion. There can be no possible justification in keeping up this quarrel."

"That is a matter of opinion," was Nell's composed answer. "Clare will have to decide for herself about that by and by."

I was sorry that Nell should speak so; but it was never any use arguing with her, so I had to let the subject drop.

A few days before Duke's return I got a letter from

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him that awakened a good deal of curiosity and speculation.

He talked about his return and fixed his train, and then he went on to something else.

"Shall you be very much surprised, or at all vexed, if I bring a fellow with me to stay a week or so? Have I ever mentioned my friend Tuke? He's a very nice sort of fellow, and I think you will like him and not find him much trouble in the house. I've never bothered you before with a chum of mine, so I daresay you will put up with the infliction with as much resignation as may be. Send the cart to meet us. We shall be with you about six."

I had hardly finished my letter before Father spoke, looking up from one before him.

"Duke is asking leave to bring home a friend with him—of course he will be very welcome—a Mr. Tuke. Has he ever mentioned him to you before? I don't remember the name myself."

"Nor I," I answered, a curious feeling stealing over me, and a question rising in my mind which I was not at all disposed to put into words. Was it only a silly, romantic, girlish notion? I thought it very probable. Men went to work in a mere matter-of-fact way. All the same I could not quite banish the suspicion. Was Mr. Tuke the real name of his friend?

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Eric's voice broke in then.

"A natural affinity I suppose, Duke and Tuke—what a harmonious pair they ought to be! Well there's room in the house for half a dozen fellows if he chose to bring them. I daresay it will be rather jolly having him. I wonder how long he will stay."

"Duke speaks of a week or two."

"Perhaps he wants to fish. Well there's plenty of that slow sport for anyone who likes it. Old Lady Tewksbury said I might fish in the river in the park if I liked, and of course she'll let Duke do the same, and his friend too. Perhaps I'll go with them sometimes; but of all poor fun commend me to fishing!"

"Particularly for people who can't catch anything," said Nell.

"And their name is legion."

I tried not to elaborate too much my theory respecting Duke's new friend. There was no reason at all why he should not know a man of that name, and bring him here to fish. I was not at all sure that I should ever impart even to Duke the idea that had entered my head, simply from the phonetic association between Tuke and Tewksbury.

Duke and his friend turned up very punctually at the appointed time. We all turned out in a body to welcome our brother, and amid the general confusion

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of welcome I was able to get a good look at Mr. Tuke, as he stood surveying the scene with a look of amusement upon his face.

He was very good-looking in a manly way, if I may so express it. He was tall and broad shouldered, and a good deal tanned, and though he was very well dressed there was not a trace of dandyism about him. He had brown hair, cut very short behind, but curling a little in front, and dark gray eyes, well shaped and well opened, that looked capable of a great deal of expression, though at present only full of a sort of lazy amusement and enjoyment. His features were very good too, more finely cut than one generally sees in men of his type. He had a slight moustache, but it did not conceal the lines of his mouth; and his mouth, I thought, was one of his best features. It bespoke a good deal of power, together with a sense of humour that I, for one, always like to see in a face.

When the welcomes had all been said, and the travellers had ridded themselves of the dust of a summer journey, we all had tea on the lawn together, and Eric was eager to know all about the Henley regatta, which event had rather delayed Duke's return.

"I wish you rowed in races, Duke. It would be so amusing. By the by, I saw that Lord Tewksbury was in the Christ Church boat that won one of the

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cups. Is he the mortal foe of our friends at Deerhurst?"

"I believe he's the usurping kinsman," was the ready response.

"Do you know him?"

"By sight, of course; but he's not in my college, you know."

"True; I suppose that makes a difference. Is he as shoddy as Lady Tewksbury and Lady Clare always represent him?"

"Can't say, I'm sure. I never heard them describe him."

I would have given much to keep my cheeks cool as this brief colloquy proceeded; but I felt my colour mounting higher and higher each moment. I longed to glance up to see if there were any covert glance of secret understanding exchanged between the men, or if by a look of amused intelligence I might read confirmation of my possibly groundless suspicion; but I felt it impossible to raise my eyes, and busied myself with the tea cups, glad that all were too busy chatting to Duke to take any notice of me.

Father came out soon and talked to our guest, who had pleasant easy manners, and found no difficulty in making his way. We all took to him, I think, and he was no fetter at all upon our enjoyment of Duke.

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He soon began telling us stories on his own account, and showed that he could be very amusing if he liked, and had a good romp with Hugh and Trixie in the hay-field that quite won their hearts.

I did not see Duke alone till after dinner, when he came upon me in the garden unawares, before I knew they had left the dining-room. Mr. Tuke was standing by the piano, as I could see, turning over Nell's music and talking to her.

"Well, Magdalen," began Duke half laughing, as he laid his hands upon my shoulders. "You are sharper than I gave you credit for being—that is unless Tuke is mistaken. He says you know our secret already."

"Oh, Duke! is it really so?"

"Is what so?"

"Is he really Lord Tewksbury?"

"The very same, come to make the acquaintance of his irate kinsfolk beneath the guise of an *incognito*. I hope that is romantic enough for you, little sister. What do you think of our plan?"

"I like it," I answered laughing, "and I am so glad you have told me straight out. I am sure I can keep the secret now that I am in it. It was being supposed not to know that was so hard, especially when Eric asked those questions. I had a faint suspicion before, when your letter came, and I think

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there is a sort of St. Maur look about his eyes—at least I fancied he was rather like some of the family portraits—though I really don't know. What are your plans? What are you going to do—and when are you going to introduce him at Deerhurst?"

"We shall see all that presently. There is no hurry, and meetings will come about in the most natural way. Only mind you keep your own counsel, and remember that he is Mr. Tuke—no more, no less."

"I shall not be likely to forget. I think it is a delightful idea. I only hope it will have all the success it deserves."

"If little Lady Clare has any love of romance—and, after all, who among us has not?—we ought not to retire altogether discomfited."

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CHAPTER IX.

THE ENCOUNTER.

LITTLE Lady Clare was wandering alone in the park at Deerhurst, with her three faithful four-footed companions around her. The heat made her feel a little languid, and she was not in very good spirits. Sometimes she felt a strange sense of oppression, as if life and the world were all too large for her. She was not quite satisfied with herself just now, and therefore not quite satisfied with other people either.

It was a very sultry day, and Clare turned her steps, by a sort of instinct, towards the river. There was one spot along the banks that had a great attraction for her, a place where the river ran in a deep chasm between high overhanging banks, almost like cliffs. It was a sort of gorge not often to be found in our gently undulating pastoral country, and strangers often were taken on purpose to look at it and admire the curious formation of the ground, and the rich colour of the red sandstone cliffs.

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Clare was very fond of this lonely sequestered spot, and often visited it when rambling about with her dogs. She turned her steps there quite naturally to-day, and was soon standing looking down into the dark chasm below.

How cool and dim and delicious it must be down there! How dark and green the water looked! How refreshing it would be to spring from the bank on to that great slab of stone, standing high and dry in midstream, and to take off shoes and stockings and dip her hot feet in the cold delicious water! Clare gazed, and gazed, again and again, and every moment the temptation became more strong.

What was to hinder her from climbing down the irregular face of the cliff, and indulging her childish fancy by wandering in the cool gorge below? Not the difficulties of the descent, surely; for Clare was light and agile, and the face of the sandstone cliff was intersected by ledges that gave a fairly good foothold. The descent, if steep, was but brief; an active child would find small difficulty in scrambling down. Clare looked, and longed and looked again, trying hard to forget that she had ever been forbidden to make that descent, and that to do so would be deliberate disobedience.

Yes, that was the difficulty. Lady Tewksbury, who

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had once taken her to the spot, had told her she must never try and get down, and yet there was no other way of reaching the bed of the stream, save by a long, tangled, circuitous path. After all, who would know if she did disobey? What did it matter, if there were nobody to be anxious about her? She would be safe enough. She wanted to get to the water, and she wanted to do it without trouble or delay. Clare was just in that languid depressed state when temptation has most power over the will. She only hesitated a few moments, and then she began the descent.

But something happened that she was not in the least prepared for. The faithful dogs, accustomed to go everywhere with their little mistress, did not see why they should desert her now. Each selected his own spot and began to scramble down the cliff after her. The child, engrossed in the difficulties of the descent, did not, in the first instance, observe the actions of her four-footed companions, but all in an moment she became aware of a darkness and a strange noise overhead, she looked up, gave a little frightened cry, and the next minute she and the big bloodhound rolled together into the gulf below.

The next thing Clare knew was that she opened her eyes to find Cortès standing over her, licking her face, and whining as if in great distress. She could not

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remember for a moment what it was that had happened to her, but in a few seconds it all came back—her wish to descend to the stream beneath, and the fall that resulted from her hound's desire to follow.

At least she was where she had wished to be a little while before, on the large flat stone so invitingly placed in the bed of the river. In falling she must have turned over in mid-air, pushed outwards by the heavy weight of the dog, and so have fallen at some little distance from the base of the sandstone cliff. Perhaps she had fared all the better for this, for there were sharp ugly stones lying there, and Cortès had got several deep gashes upon his shoulder, from which the blood was trickling; but he wagged his tail and expressed his joy by many dumb signs when his little mistress opened her eyes, and seemed to have no pity to spare for herself.

Clare raised herself slowly on her elbow and tried to sit up, but the effort made her faint and giddy. She felt all bruised and stiff, and laid her head against Cortès, who sat very still so as to make a comfortable pillow. Wuffles was nestling up beside her, but Fib had disappeared altogether. Clare, however, hardly noticed this defection, being still very dazed and bewildered. But she knew that nobody would be likely to come to this lonely place, and that she must try to

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get home alone; and when, by and by, the giddiness began to pass off again, she slowly moved, and holding tightly by Cortès' collar, tried to pull herself to her feet. But the moment she moved her right foot to put it to the ground, so sharp a pain ran through it that she desisted from the effort with a little cry, all the dizzy faintness coming back even worse than before.

She realized gradually the position she was in. She had had a bad fall—had hurt herself too much to be able to move—and here she must remain, ill and in pain and alone, until she was missed at home and a search instituted. It might be hours before she was found, and meantime the sprained foot was beginning to swell, and the pressure of the high buttoned boot growing almost intolerable. But the child was too weak and faint to struggle with the buttons herself. Bending forward to reach the foot made her worse, and she was forced to lean back again upon Cortès and just endure the increasing pain as best she might.

How long a time went by thus she did not know, but presently she was aroused by hearing the sound of a sharp, familiar bark. It was Fib's voice, she knew, and the bark was one of urgent command, mingled with eager entreaty. With the sound of the dog's voice came another sound—a sort of splashing and trampling as if someone were wading through the shallow bed

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of the stream. The sounds came nearer and nearer; and presently Clare heard a startled exclamation:

"By Jove, though! What's this? The dog did mean something after all!"

Next moment, Fib, all wet and dripping, was rapturously caressing his little mistress, whilst a young man in long waterproof boots, with a fisherman's rod in his hand, was standing beside her, looking down at her with a kindly concern in his gray eyes.

"Why, you've hurt yourself, I'm afraid. Your dog found me half a mile down stream, and gave me no peace till I followed him. I thought he was leading me a wild-goose chase, but he was so urgent I had to come. I am very glad I did. What is the matter? You are ill, arn't you?"

Little Lady Clare roused herself with an effort to look at the stranger and answer him. She liked his face, and that helped her.

"I have had a fall. I have hurt my foot, I think. Perhaps you would be so good as to let them know at home."

The young man was fumbling in his pocket. He presently produced a flask, and was already pouring some of its contents into the glass that fitted on to it. Then he held it out to her.

"It's only sherry, but it will do you good. Don't

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TUKE ASSISTS CLARE AFTER HER FALL.

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you trouble about anything now. I'll manage it all for you."

Clare drank and soon felt better. He saw the colour coming back to the white little face.

"Now, which foot is hurt?" he said, kneeling down on the stone beside her.

"The right; but you mustn't touch it," was the quick but slightly imperious answer.

"Yes, I must. I must get that boot off and put a wet bandage on. It's only a sprain I daresay, but that is no reason why it should be neglected."

"Are you a doctor?" asked Clare, as the young man proceeded to unfasten the boot with gentle dexterous fingers.

"Doctor enough for the present case, I think. Now, I am going to spoil this pretty boot of yours by slitting it up, and then it won't hurt you getting it off. If any one scolds, lay the blame on me."

"No one will scold," answered Clare, with a touch of dignity. "I am very much obliged to you."

For the relief of feeling the boot off was very great, and the cold water poured over the hot, swollen ancle soothed the pain wonderfully.

"You are very kind to take so much trouble," said her little ladyship gratefully. "Now, please do not waste any more of your time. We have spoiled your

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morning's fishing as it is, I am afraid. If you would be so very kind as to let them know at home where I am, you can soon go back to your sport. I shall be quite comfortable here till they come for me."

"Query there. I think you have been lying quite long enough on that hard stone in this cold damp place. I suppose it is not far away that you live?"

"Oh, no; less than half a mile."

"Good; then there will be no difficulty about it, but I will bind up the foot first."

Clare did not quite understand what he meant, but was feeling sufficiently weak and ill to leave him to settle matters his own way. She watched him with languid curiosity as he folded his large silk handkerchief into a sort of bandage, and dipped it into the stream; and then she began to wonder who he could be, for he was evidently fishing in their river, and no one might do that without special permission. Surely he must know her grandmother? He was too much the gentleman to be trespassing and poaching.

"Are you staying in the neighbourhood?" she asked, as he turned towards her again.

"Yes; at the Rectory. I came down with young Melville the other day; we are at Oxford together."

Lady Clare smiled with pretty cordiality.

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"You are Mr. Tuke then. You are not quite a stranger. The Melville's are great friends of mine."

He smiled and took the little hand extended to him.

"That is very well, is it not? Then you will trust yourself to me with all the more confidence. I am going to tie up your foot first, and then I am going to carry you home. Somebody will have to, you know; and I am stronger than most men. I shall hurt you less, I flatter myself, than another fellow would; and besides it is high time you were moved. You are getting chilled through and through."

It was quite true; the shock of the fall and the pain of the sprained ancle and the damp coldness of the place, all combined to produce an unnatural state of chill and shivering that was very bad for the child. She was small and slight for her years, and the young athlete made nothing of her weight. She had no energy to resist his verdict, and the longing to be at home again conquered every feeling of hesitation and reluctance.

He bound up the foot cleverly enough, gave her some more sherry from the flask, and then lifting her in his strong arms as easily as if she were a baby, he went splashing through the stream until he was clear of the gorge, and had reached a spot where both banks were practicable.

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"Now, you must tell me the way to go;" he said. "Where is it you live?"

"At Deerhurst," she answered faintly; "the big house you know. I am Lady Clare St. Maur."

The young man strode on rapidly in the direction indicated, a gleam of something like triumphant satisfaction lighting his eyes. The child lay perfectly still in his arms. The unusual movement, and the inevitable pain in the foot, now that it was hanging down, had blanched the little face again. The violet eyes were fast closed, the long black lashes rested motionless upon the white cheek. An odd expression flitted over the bearer's face as he glanced again and again at the head resting against his shoulder. He did not feel the sultry heat of the day, nor the dead weight in his arms. His thoughts were so busy that he had no time to spare for outward sensations.

His arrival at Deerhurst produced an immediate excitement. Lady Tewksbury was upon the spot almost before he had fairly entered the hall. She led the way into the cool west drawing-room, and in obedience to a sign from her, the young man laid his half-unconscious burden down upon the sofa. Mrs. Blount was already there with restoratives, and in a very few minutes Clare opened her eyes.

"Don't be frightened, Grandmother. I have only

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had a little fall and sprained my ancle. This gentleman is Mr. Tuke, the Melville's friend. He is a doctor, and he very kindly brought me home. He will tell you there is nothing to be frightened at."

In a country place where doctors were difficult to catch, and often not to be had under many hours of waiting, this item of intelligence was very welcome. Mr. Tuke smiled a little, however, as he disclaimed any actual qualified skill.

"I cannot claim to be a doctor exactly; but I have lived a great deal with a cousin of mine, who is a very clever surgeon, and he has taught me a great deal in a practical way. I assure you, however, that no bones are broken, and that it is nothing worse than a sprain, and I can bandage it up in proper style if you will let me. Lady Clare should have some good strong soup or beef-tea, too, very quickly, and be kept warm and quiet. If she could get a good sleep, that would be the best thing for her."

Something in the young man's manner seemed to inspire Lady Tewksbury with confidence. She accepted his offer with gratitude, and followed out his instructions with alacrity. Clare was soon made comfortable, and began to look more like herself again. She submitted to Mr. Tuke's handling much more willingly than she would have done to that of Mr. Conway's

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locum tenens, a rough and ready sort of man, whom she regarded with a mixture of dislike and disgust, and before he left she looked up half wistfully to ask:

"I wish you would be my doctor till my foot gets well."

"I will, with pleasure, if Lady Tewksbury will permit it," he answered smiling.

Lady Tewksbury hesitated, but Clare's imploring glance conquered her natural reluctance to accept favours from a stranger.

"If Mr. Tuke can make time to come and see you sometimes he will be very welcome indeed; but you must remember, my dear, that he has other things to do than wait upon your pleasure. My little granddaughter is sometimes inclined to be rather exacting," she added, turning to the stranger with one of the smiles that could be so very attractive; "but you must not let her take advantage of your kindness. At the same time you will always be very welcome here, both as a friend of the Melvilles, and in remembrance of the very great service you have rendered us to-day. I hope before you leave this part of the country that we shall become better acquainted."

"I trust so too," answered Mr. Tuke, taking with a smile the proffered hand. He said good-bye to Clare,

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who was already growing drowsy, but who roused up to ask him to leave word what ought to be done for the cuts on Cortès' shoulder, and to promise to come again to-morrow; and having been satisfied that both these requests would be attended to, she let him go, and fell asleep almost at once.

Meantime we at home knew nothing of all that was passing; for though I have told the story in its right place, I really only heard all about it afterwards—first from Mr. Tuke (I shall call him Mr. Tuke though he really was Lord Tewksbury), and then from little Lady Clare.

Duke came home about half-past twelve saying that his companion had mysteriously disappeared. They had selected different spots at which to fish, and had agreed to meet at noon and compare notes; but Tuke had not kept the appointment, and was nowhere to be found. Duke gave him up at length, and returned home to see if he had turned up there.

We, however, had seen nothing of him; but just as we were sitting down to luncheon in he came, rather flushed and hot, and told us of his adventure.

Duke and I of course enjoyed it most, being in the secret of his identity; but we were all interested, and made him go over every detail many times.

"Isn't she pretty?" asked Eric with boyish frank-

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ness. "I wish I'd had the luck to rescue her from such a predicament."

"And carry her home across the park?" asked Nell mischievously. "I wonder how many times you would have dropped her."

"Ah, well! there is something in that. Such lucky chances don't fall to everyone's lot."

"She's the loveliest child imaginable," said Mr. Tuke afterwards, as he talked things over with Duke and me in the garden. "She has the most beautiful hair and eyes I ever saw. And to think that I have turned her out of her rights, so to speak! I hate the thought of it. I always did think it a horrid shame, and I am sure of it now. She is far more fit to be a countess than I an earl."

"You had better make her one then," returned Duke laconically.

Mr. Tuke laughed, but he blushed a little too. He knew what Duke meant, but he did not seem disposed to jest upon the subject, and I liked him the better for this.

"You have won your footing in the house at least," said Duke after a pause. "You have introduced yourself far better than I could have introduced you. You stand now upon your own merits. You are not simply our friend."

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Mr. Tuke twisted his moustache and said nothing.

"Did you like Lady Tewksbury?" I asked.

"She was very gracious to me. She is a very handsome woman—just like all the St. Maurs."

"Are you like the St. Maurs yourself?"

"Luckily not, for our plan. I take after my mother's family."

"I like Lady Tewksbury," I said. "She is not half so cold or hard or difficult to get on with as some people think."

"I hope, then, that you will come with me when I pay my next visit. I confess I stand in some little awe of her ladyship."

"I will come with you gladly. I shall want to see Clare, and to watch how you get on."

He pulled his moustache again; his face was somewhat clouded.

"What's the matter, Tuke?" asked my brother.

"Nothing much; only I hate it all, somehow."

"Hate what?"

"Why, all this concealment and tomfoolery."

"You don't like acting a part, eh? You didn't mind the idea a few hours back."

"No, I know I didn't."

"Then why this change now?"

"I can't tell quite. Perhaps I'm a fool for my

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pains, but it seems low, somehow—deceiving everbody, and obtaining the *entrée* of a house to which I should never be admitted if my true name were known. It didn't seem to matter much so long as it only appeared likely that I should be treated as a stranger; but when they begin to talk and act as if I were to be received almost on the footing of a friend, then I feel as if I were acting under false pretences."

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CHAPTER X.

UNDER FALSE PRETENCES.

I LIKED Mr. Tuke all the better for his feeling of unwillingness to enter Deerhurst under what he called false pretences: and yet I could not feel sorry that the plan had been entered upon; for I thought it would pave the way for little Lady Clare out of many difficulties, and I was not sure that even Lady Tewksbury might not in the end be half relieved to find the reconciliation in a manner forced upon her. If she really liked this young man for what he was himself, she could hardly repudiate his acquaintance simply on the ground that he was her kinsman; and if she had received him on his own merits, and had made a favourable estimate of his character, pride alone would almost hinder her from going back too much from her word when his identity should be made known. For my own part, I believed that she would be rather glad to have to accept him *nolens volens*, without being brought to the point of admitting

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him knowingly to her house. She would have a sort of cover behind which to shelter herself, and would always be able to say that the onus of the matter did not rest with herself. I tried to impart some of my opinions on this point to Mr. Tuke, and I think I did make him feel more comfortable. He was very glad indeed to hear that I thought a reconciliation quite possible and practicable, and he told me how it had gone against the grain with him to succeed to the property, which he too considered ought to have belonged to little Lady Clare. He had tried to find out if he could not make it over to her when he came of age; but he had been told that that would be quite impracticable. The estate and title must go together.

I went with him next day to Deerhurst, and we were admitted to Clare's favourite vestibule-room, where she was lying upon a couch with her dogs about her. She was completely dressed, only that in the place of the heavy crape and black in which I had always seen her, she now wore a little white morning wrapper trimmed with delicate lace, which was much cooler and more comfortable for an invalid's wear. Her face was pale, and her golden hair encircled her like a cloud. She made a charming picture in that big, cool, empty-looking place, all the more charming from her childlike unconsciousness. She had no

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more idea of posing than the dogs beside her. Her face lighted at our approach.

"I hoped you would come, Magdalen. I thought you would. You have brought Mr. Tuke with you. I wanted him to come too. Did he tell you how kind he had been to me yesterday?"

"He told us how brave you had been. How is the foot to-day?"

"Oh, pretty comfortable, thank you, only the bandage has got loose since this morning."

"We'll soon set that to rights," answered Mr. Tuke, "unless you have a proper doctor coming."

"Until Mr. Conway comes home there will be no such person in the place," answered her little ladyship with a touch of scorn; and then Lady Tewksbury came in and greeted us very cordially, and I talked to her, whilst Mr. Tuke sat beside the child's couch and entertained her in a fashion that seemed very much to her liking.

I heard her laugh several times, and Clare's laugh was not particularly easy to elicit, and I could see by the brightness of her eyes that she was interested and pleased by her companion. Lady Tewksbury observed this herself, as I fancied with satisfaction, and she persuaded us to stay to lunch, though we had not had any intention of doing so at the outset.

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She talked to the young man about himself and his family as we sat at lunch, and tried to draw him out. He spoke freely about his connections on his mother's side, and although I did not know any of the names he mentioned, Lady Tewksbury evidently did, and was very well satisfied by all she heard. I saw that she recognized Mr. Tuke's right to be ranked amongst the county families whose names she knew, and after that, she was quite at ease as regards the friendship so suddenly established. She was too exclusive by birth and training to care to admit any stranger to her house, not even a friend of ours, unless he could come up to her high, if rather narrow standard of qualification. Now, however, she had satisfied herself that Mr. Tuke's antecedents were irreproachable; and she knew so very little of the hostile branch of the St. Maur family that none of the names mentioned had even suggested to her mind the possible connection of this young man with the despised and detested race.

We saw Clare again before we left and promised another visit on the following day. After that, indeed, Mr. Tuke became a regular caller, and though the foot progressed so rapidly as to require little attention, yet he was supposed to have the case in his hands, and he regulated the amount of exertion permitted to the little invalid.

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Sometimes he went over alone, but more frequently one of us accompanied him. Eric liked to go as often as he could find excuse, or the children would beg to be allowed the treat of a walk with him. Duke and I went from time to time, curious to see how the friendship throve. Nell generally called alone, and her visits were paid quite as much to Lady Tewksbury as to Clare.

Mr. Tuke did not talk about leaving. He stayed on and on, and I don't think any of us troubled to wonder at it. I was glad nobody asked me questions about him, or the probable length of his visit; for my own impression was that he did not wish to leave the neighbourhood until his mission had been accomplished, and a complete reconciliation established between himself and his kinsfolk at Deerhurst.

As we grew intimate with Mr. Tuke, we talked freely to him about the affairs of the place, and I did not know whether to be vexed or amused at hearing Eric and Nell discourse to him sometimes of the wrongs inflicted upon Lady Clare by her unknown kinsman, or rather by the law that disinherited her in his favour.

Eric, although her loyal admirer and humble servant, took a masculine and logical view of the situation—blamed the existing laws, not the man who was bound

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by them, and declared it a great pity that a reconciliation and compromise could not be effected; whilst Nell, less personally attached to Clare, but much influenced by Lady Tewksbury, spoke with scorn and rancour of this upstart kinsman, and was of opinion that he ought always to be treated with the contempt he merited.

Mr. Tuke must have been considerably amused by these hotly argued questions, though he took but little share in the discussion himself. He always listened, however, to all that was said, and he was very discreet and self-controlled, and never betrayed by a single word or look that the matter had any personal interest for him. I am sure that if I had not guessed the secret beforehand I never should have suspected the least thing from his manner.

As he grew more intimate at Deerhurst and rose in Lady Clare's good graces, she began to talk to him more fully and frankly than she had done at the first. He had made his way rapidly with her, owing perhaps to the unusual manner of their introduction. She had taken a liking to him, out of gratitude possibly in the first instance, but it was a liking that undoubtedly deepened with time. He amused and he interested her, and she divined that he had a special interest in herself, though far from guessing the cause. Some-

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times I think that there is a good deal of truth in the old adage, that "blood is thicker than water," for certainly Mr. Tuke made his way with wonderful ease with Lady Tewksbury and her granddaughter.

Once I came in for the end of a discussion between him and Clare and Nell, that showed me how nearly he was allowed to approach the subject of so much importance to himself. They were all so engrossed in talk that I do not think my approach was heard or heeded.

"Well, Lady Clare, I see your point of course," Mr. Tuke was saying, "but all the same I do not think that you are to be pitied."

"I do not ask for pity," answered her little ladyship with a touch of disdain.

"Only for justice," added Nell.

"What I mean is this," pursued the young man with an earnest gravity that won the attention of both listeners, "that when by the existing laws of a land an act, that looks, on the face of it, like one of spoilation and injustice, has to be done, I for my part, think that the man who is the gainer by such an arrangement much more to be pitied than the one who is the loser."

Clare looked very thoughtful and said nothing, the young man presently went on speaking.

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"Suppose property were to come to you, that you felt ought by right to belong to another, would you feel very much elated at getting it?"

"I should give it up to the rightful heir," was the quick answer.

"You would be the 'rightful heir' legally in such a case, and the restitution you propose might not be possible. You know for yourself that, in a case of entail, the possessor for the time being, has only a life interest in the estate. He cannot dispose of it as if it were his own by right of purchase. Say, Lady Clare, would you rather be cut out of, or come into a property in such a fashion as that?"

"I would rather lose it, as I have done," answered Clare, who was looking very grave, evidently seeing the question in quite a new light. "I should hate to feel I was enjoying things that I did not think fully belonged to me."

"I am sure you would," answered Mr. Tuke looking straight at her with his frank, keen gaze. "My own feeling in such a case is, that it must be much pleasanter to be the injured party rather than the injuring one. If anyone is to be pitied it is Lord Tewksbury I think."

Nell tossed her head with a little gesture of scorn.

"If he were anything like you, Mr. Tuke, possibly

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that might be so; but I think you need waste no compassion upon him. By all accounts he is not the kind of man who will be troubled by any nice scruples of your kind. He is what the boys would call 'a thorough-going cad,' and will only triumph in the grandeur of the position he is so little fit to fill."

Mr. Tuke's eyes were still fixed on Clare's face.

"Is this so?" he asked.

She was silent a little while and then said:

"I do not know."

"You told me so yourself once," said Nell with a certain finality in her tone.

"I daresay I did. I thought it once myself; but I am not sure that we were right. We have heard different accounts since that."

"You have never seen him then?" asked Mr. Tuke.

"Oh, no!"

The answer came so quickly that the next question seemed natural enough.

"Why should it be so impossible? A personal interview often does away with much misapprehension."

"Grandmother would not like it," answered Lady Clare quickly and decidedly.

"And you?"

She twisted her hands together and said nothing.

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"Of course you would never receive him!" said Nell hotly; "an upstart and usurper!"

Clare sighed with a sort of dissatisfaction.

"I do not know," she said; "it is so hard to make up one's mind."

"Is it so very hard to be generous?" asked Mr. Tuke with a grave smile.

Clare's pale face flushed a delicate pink.

"Do you think it would be generous to do so?"

"Undoubtedly—what do you think yourself?"

"And ungenerous to hold back?"

"I did not say that. That would depend a good deal upon the line that he takes—the upstart and usurper as Miss Nell calls him. What does *he* think about it all?"

Nell tossed her head as much as to say that *his* feelings were quite beneath notice; but Clare answered gravely:

"His guardian spoke as if they would all be glad to make it up. It was proposed that we should go to the castle again when he comes of age, to see him and put an end to the feud."

"Yes, I think I heard that. Well, Lady Clare, are you going?"

"I don't know. Grandmother will not."

"Will she let you?"

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"Yes, if I wish."

"Do you wish?"

"I don't know. I think it might be right, but it would be very hard."

"Why?"

"To see the old home that was always mine belonging to somebody else. I daresay you don't understand; but it would be very hard to me. I'm not sure if even I went, I could ever give my hand to Lord Tewksbury, or say I would be friends with him. I should like to do what was right and generous; but I sometimes think *that* would be the hardest way of all."

He sat still awhile, during which time Nell had a good deal to urge against any such scheme. Luckily, I think, her vehement scorn roused in Clare a sense of opposition. The faint antagonism always existing between those two disposed them always to take different sides of a question.

Mr. Tuke went on speaking after a time, without paying any attention to Nell.

"If that is so," he said, "why doesn't he come here to pay his respects to you?"

"I wish he would," said Clare, the words seeming to escape her almost before she was aware of it.

"Do you really?"

She hesitated a moment, and then said:

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"I think I do. I think I should like to see him and judge for myself. I do not want to go to his house as his guest, if he is not a man I could respect and like; and yet if it is wrong to keep up an old family feud when there is no reason for it, I don't want to do that either. I should like it much better if he were to come here."

"Lady Tewksbury might not receive him."

"Perhaps not if she knew; but he might take us unawares."

Mr. Tuke smiled, and her little ladyship also. She seemed pleased with this new idea.

"If he did, would you not be the first to say that he had taken a great liberty?"

She laughed a little at that.

"I don't know; perhaps I might. But I think I should be glad too. I feel as though something ought to be done, and I would much rather he made the first move. I think after all that has happened it is his place to do so. But then, unfortunately, he is only a boy. I suppose he can hardly be expected to know what is due to us."

Mr. Tuke smiled again.

"Is he older than yourself, Lady Clare?"

"I don't know—oh yes, of course he must be, for he comes of age the spring after next. But it does not

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follow that he is anything but a great boy really. It would be easier, I think, if he were a man."

Lady Tewksbury came in then, and asked Clare if she had been discussing the arrangements for her birthday. It seemed that next week would bring that anniversary round again, and she was anxious to celebrate it by a picnic to a distant ruin, if she could get leave to take the long drive. Mr. Tuke's opinion was taken on that point, and he said he saw no reason against it. The ancle was going on as well as possible, and in another week's time would be much stronger. Driving would do no harm; all that need be avoided was any scrambling about the ruins. She would have to keep to the level and walk with a stick, and this she was quite prepared to do.

We were all invited to come; indeed we were the backbone of the entertainment, for it was doubtful if Lady Tewksbury would herself care to join the party, and little Lady Clare, though taking so kindly and readily to us, had not made friends with other people in the neigbourhood. Distances were long, which made intimacies somewhat difficult, and there were not many people to know. We were, however, quite ready to enter into Clare's wishes about the place to be visited and the way it was to be reached; and Mr. Tuke was specially invited. Madame Delaine would

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accompany her little ladyship if Lady Tewksbury did not come, and Clare was too well used to some kind of escort to resent the presence of the *gouvernante*.

As we walked home that afternoon, I said laughingly to Mr. Tuke:

"You heard some amusing revelations to-day. I hope you don't mind the way in which Nell abuses you?"

"Not at all. It is quite refreshing, and shows how well my *incognito* is preserved; but I shall not keep it up much longer."

"No?"

"No. I understand pretty well how the land lies now, and I do not see that much will be gained by waiting. I don't see why I shouldn't declare myself next week."

"So soon?"

"Yes, I think so. At the picnic. I have an idea about that."

"Well, you know best, I suppose. I hope it will all go off well; but little Lady Clare can be a little *difficile* you know."

"I can quite believe it; but I think I understand her now, and I am getting uncommonly tired of appearing under false pretences."

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CHAPTER XI.

LORD TEWKSBURY.

LADY CLARE'S birthday picnic was a great success. We had a nice fine day for it, and we all enjoyed ourselves exceedingly. The ruin was a very extensive one, and by this time Clare could wander about a good deal. Her foot was almost well again, and she could walk quite easily where the ground was not hard or rough.

I had often been to the old abbey before, and so I did not care so much for scrambling about as the younger ones did, nor was I clever enough to enter into the architectural beauties that Duke was busy pointing out to his friend. I sat with Clare in the shade beneath the arches of the beautiful hoary chapel. We looked about us at the delicate stone tracery and the ivy mantling the whole of the crumbling ruin, and we were silent for a long while, each of us thinking our own thoughts.

Presently she looked up and said:

"Magdalen, don't places like this sometimes make

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you feel rather sad—no, not sad exactly, but grave and strange? Don't you sometimes wonder about the people who once planned and built it all, and who lived here long, long ago? I suppose old monks used to live in the abbey once, and chant psalms and masses in this chapel. I wonder if some young monk ever sat where we are sitting now, and whether he ever thought the same sort of things as we think when we sit here. Was he happy, do you think, living such a still, quiet life? or did he want to go out into the world and see other things and fight other battles? I wonder if the old monks were right in hiding away and shutting themselves up from the world? Sometimes I think it is just what I should like to do; but I know I shouldn't really. Should you?"

"No, not at all; but perhaps if we had lived in very wild, lawless, turbulent days, when all the world seemed very full of strife and wickedness, we should have felt as they did. There is generally something good and beautiful at the bottom of all those old beliefs and habits, even though they may have become corrupted in later days."

"Yes, I can understand that," answered Clare; "but all the same I feel sure I should always have wanted to be in the thick of everything. Sometime I wish so much I had lived long ago, when there was always

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fighting and excitement going on everywhere. Do you ever feel so?"

"Not very much now; but I did when I was as young as you. I think most of us wish it till we get old enough to understand that there is quite enough fighting still left for us to do."

She gave me a little quick glance.

"I know what you mean, Magdalen; but—but—well that kind of fighting doesn't seem *interesting.* I know it is quite right, and I want to be good—I do indeed; but there doesn't seem any romance or glory about it, if you know what I mean."

I was silent a little while, and then I said:

"I wonder if the old monks who once lived here, or the warriors who are perhaps buried beneath this abbey floor, could look back—as perhaps they can—to the days when they lived and struggled and fought, whether they would think there was enough glory and romance in those battles to make people long to have lived in the midst of them."

Clare was very grave and thoughtful.

"Perhaps when we come to die," she said softly, "everything will look alike."

"Not quite that, I think Clare; but perhaps the big things will seem small, and the small ones large; and I think the battles that do not seem interesting or

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even very important now may perhaps look very different then."

"Yes, I know what you mean. Sometimes I think that too, and then it all goes again. Magdalen, I feel as if I had grown a great deal older this last year."

"Do you, dear? Why?"

"I don't know if I can explain; but I have different sort of thoughts. Things seem different to me. I'm not always as happy as I was—and yet *really* I'm happier. I don't know if I can make you understand. I don't know if I quite understand it myself. I think once I was quite pleased with everything I did, and didn't trouble about anything so long as I just kept Grandmother's rules, and didn't get into disgrace with her or my governesses. I fancied everything I did or I thought must be right, and I never tried to be a bit different. It isn't like that now. I often and often *wish* one thing and *want* another, and then there comes a sort of a struggle, and I am worried and bothered, and don't know quite what I shall do or think or say. It isn't enough now just to *seem* good and obedient—I want to *be*, not to seem; and I keep making so many slips. I was disobedient the day I had that fall, and Grandmother never scolded me a bit, which made me feel all the sorrier, I think. I want to be good really, right through, and not to keep going

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back and being silly and babyish and naughty. It seems as if it ought to be easy, but it isn't."

"No, indeed, it isn't, Clare. We all of us know that. It is just one long battle all our lives, and the rest only comes at the end, when life is over."

"Why, do *you* feel like that?"

"Indeed yes."

"I thought you were always good. Calm, quiet people like you seem to be good by nature."

I could not help laughing at that.

"Indeed, little Lady Clare, that shows how very little you know of life."

She did not laugh; she was very grave.

"Then life is a very hard thing, is it not?"

"Yes, rather; but a very beautiful thing too, I think, for those who will make it so."

Clare looked up at the tracery of the east window, standing out clear and sharp against the sunny blue of the sky, and she smiled to herself, and by and by she put up her face to be kissed.

"I feel better now," she said. "I like a *grave* talk sometimes. Now, shall we light the fire and boil the kettle? I am so thirsty."

Eric had made a sort of gypsy encampment, laid the fire, and swung the kettle all ready for us. Father and Lady Tewksbury, who had, after all, driven over

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for part of the day, had gone now, taking Madame Delaine with them, as she was evidently getting very tired of the *triste* ruin. We enjoyed the freedom from the presence of the elders, at least the children did, and Clare too; and we made very merry over our *al fresco* tea.

We did not have the ruin quite to ourselves, but the other people who were looking round were perfect strangers, and took no notice of our proceedings. We were all very merry over our meal, none more so than Mr. Tuke, who was as full of fun as a schoolboy, and even appeared a little excited. I don't suppose anyone else noticed this, but I did, and I fancied I could guess the reason.

Presently our party broke up, and scattered for one final ramble about the place before the return home. I, as before, remained with Clare, who had been forbidden to do any more walking that day, and who was, in truth, somewhat fatigued by so much exertion and so much fun.

As we were sitting together in our favourite nook Duke came up to us, with a look on his face of mingled gravity and humour.

"Lady Clare," he said, looking straight at her, "I have a piece of news for you."

"For me?"

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"Yes. I do not know whether you will thank me or not for what I have done, but if you are angry, I can only throw myself humbly on your mercy."

Clare was looking very much surprised, as well she might.

"What have you done? What do you mean? I don't understand."

"I will come to the point at once. Do you know that Lord Tewksbury is here—in this ruin?"

She started and flushed deeply.

"Lord Tewksbury? How do you know?"

'He is at Oxford. I know him by sight—I know him pretty well, in fact."

"You never told me that."

"No. Perhaps I should have done so, but I did not know if the subject would be agreeable to you."

She had her hands pressed close together, the colour was coming and going in her face. I could see by this that she was a great deal more excited than she wished to appear.

"Have you spoken to him? To-day, I mean?"

"Yes."

"Have you told him?—I mean does he know that I am here?"

"Yes."

"And is he going away?"

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"He will do so, I have no doubt, if he hears you wish it; but he is most anxious for an introduction first?"

"An introduction—to me?"

"Yes; and I was almost bold enough to promise it to him. Are you very angry?"

"I don't know. It is all so sudden, and Grandmother is not here. What would she say?"

Duke was silent. I ventured to put in a word then.

"I think, Clare, I have understood you to say that Lady Tewksbury will allow you, in this matter, to be guided by your own wishes and convictions."

"Yes, I know—she has said so. I believe she would let me if I wished; but I do not know if I do. I must think. It is all so sudden."

We did not hurry her. We let her take her time. I heard her murmur some words beneath her breath:

"Papa wished it, and Mamma too. They did not feel as we do. Forgive us as we forgive—I suppose it would not be real forgiveness if I would not see him, and I do want to be good—I do want to do right." Then she looked up at Duke and asked:

"You are sure he wishes it himself?"

"Yes, quite sure."

"And he is the kind of man that Grandmother would not mind my speaking to—if he were anybody else?"

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"I am certain that, except for his name, she could have no objection to him."

There was another long pause, after which Lady Clare said, very quietly and firmly:

"Then will you please bring him to me here."

Duke vanished, and Clare sat very still in the nook beneath a little lancet window, where we had ensconced her for tea. She only spoke to me once, and that was to ask quickly:

"Do you think I have done right, Magdalen?"

"Quite right," I answered; and then we were both of us silent, waiting for the return of Duke with the "hostile kinsman." I was glad at this moment that all the rest were far away, scattered about the ruin. I did not particulary wish them to witness the meeting.

Steps were heard approaching. Duke appeared with Lord Tewksbury in his wake. Clare glanced beyond them, her face a little pale, her eyes very bright.

"I thought perhaps this was your doing, Mr. Tuke," she said, assuming a composure she did not feel; "to pay me out, I suppose, for my rash admissions last week. You may bring him here now."

"He is before you now, Lady Clare," answered Duke, laying his hand upon his friend's shoulder; and Lord Tewksbury, half playfully, yet in very great

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earnest all the time, went down on one knee before her.

"The prisoner stands confessed, Lady Clare, at the bar of your judgment. Is it pardon or dismissal that he is to receive at your ladyship's hands?"

Clare sat perfectly still and silent. She took in the whole situation at a glance with the quickness of perception natural to her, but instead of exclaiming and wondering and questioning as other children would have done, she remained absolutely quiet, and her face gave no indication of what was passing in her mind.

At last she looked up at Duke.

"Is this Lord Tewksbury?"

"Yes, Lady Clare."

"Did you know it all the time?"

"I did."

"And you, Magdalen?"

"Magdalen guessed the secret very quickly," answered Duke for me; "but it was not of her making."

"Of whose making was it, then?"

"Mine—and your kinsman's."

Lady Clare seemed to wince a little at the word. All this time she had not looked at young Lord Tewksbury, who was still kneeling on one knee before her; now, however, she turned her glance upon him.

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"Get up," she said, "and look me in the face. I want to ask you a question."

He rose, and fixed his frank gaze upon her. There was no shame and no fear in his eyes, but a look of such sincere friendship and good-will as must, I thought, be a passport to her favour.

"Why did you play this trick upon us?"

"Because I wanted to see you. I wanted to know you, and I did not know how else to approach."

"I do not like deceit," she said.

"Nor I," he answered. "I found that out very soon, but it was too late to draw back then. I said I must go through with what I had begun, and I think you liked me, Lady Clare."

"I liked Mr. Tuke," she said quietly but somewhat incisively.

"I wish I could always remain Mr. Tuke," he said, "or, rather, what I once was—Mr. St. Maur."

She looked at him steadily.

"Do you mean what you say?"

"I do indeed," he answered earnestly. "It was no mere fictitious case I put before you the other day. I hate to have supplanted you in the old family property. If I had power to do so, I would give it up to-morrow. I was well off before. I had everything I reasonably wanted, and I do not in the least desire

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the responsibilities of a position for which I am not sure that I am suited. I am not at all surprised that you hate me. Feud or no feud, it is enough to stir anyone's blood to be supplanted as you have been. I did hope I might be able to heal the breach, though no doubt it was very presumptuous to think so. But if I may never be allowed to call you friend, at least I hope that I shall not be looked upon as a foe. Lady Clare, I think I can never altogether regret the step that has brought me such a pleasant acquaintance with you, even though it was won under false pretences. I shall always look back to this month as one of the pleasantest I have ever spent. If I must say good-bye to you now, I hope you will let me feel that I do not part from you under a cloud of anger, and that some day you will perhaps let me see your face again."

He held out his hand, but Clare did not take it.

"Why are you going away?" she asked.

"Because I fear my presence will be distasteful to you now."

She was very grave as she looked at him, yet there was much sweetness in the gentle childish face, framed in its wealth of golden hair.

"Do not go just yet, Lord Tewksbury. I am not angry with you."

"You forgive me for the deception?"

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"Yes, I forgive you. I think you meant it for the best."

She held out her hand which he took in his, and bending his knee he kissed it, lifting his hat as he did so.

Little Lady Clare smiled slightly, the tension of her muscles relaxing somewhat. They looked each other in the face for a few seconds and both smiled more naturally.

"What will Grandmother say?" questioned the little girl at length.

"I'm awfully afraid of Lady Tewksbury," said the young man. "I feel like cutting and running rather than face her."

"You must not do that," said Clare in her queenly little way. "*I* will introduce you."

"Your ladyship's good word should be a passport anywhere."

"I do not know that quite," said Clare thoughtfully; "but I will do my best."

"Thank you for that word, Lady Clare. Am I still to have the honour of calling myself your friend?"

There was just a momentary hesitation, and then a very pretty smile flashed over the child's face.

"Yes, let us be friends," she said simply. "It is much better to be friends than enemies; and we need

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not wait for your majority to make up the family feud."

Duke and I left them to make the peace in their own fashion. I looked eagerly at him as we emerged into the open ruin together.

"Oh, Duke, then it is done!"

"I think so. There is only Lady Tewksbury now. For my own part, I have a great respect for the dowager. She has inherited a good deal of strong prejudice and family pride, it is true; but she has sound judgment and a good heart. When she sees how the land lies really, how little Tewksbury enjoys the position he holds, and how much he sympathizes with their view of the case, I do not believe she will hold out against him. She is really the last woman in the world who would wish to see existing laws of property subverted, and it is perfectly absurd for her to resent upon Tewksbury a succession for which he is not in the least responsible. She has liked him for his own sake, not knowing who he was. Her own common sense and dignity will hardly let her turn round now."

"Unless on the ground of the deception."

"Unless; but most women, I think, like a spice of romance. Little Lady Clare did, it was very plain; she soon forgave him."

"I think perhaps she had a higher motive than that,

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Duke," I answered. "Clare has been very anxious to do right in this matter. I think she acted from principle."

"I think so too. Well, the little drama is played out now, and it is time we were going. I will order the carriages."

Lady Clare selected me and Lord Tewksbury as her companions in the landau—the only carriage in which she was allowed to drive.

"I shall call you Tuke," she said to the young man as we departed, a little in advance of the others. "I cannot say 'Mr.' any more, and the other name will not come yet. I shall call you Tuke, as Duke Melville does—do you mind?"

"Not at all, Lady Clare. You may call me anything you like, so long as you call me friend as well."

"Yes, we have settled all that; and I am glad—I think I am very glad. And to-morrow you will come and see Grandmother?"

"If you wish it, yes."

"I do wish it. Magdalen, will you came too? Come about five to-morrow afternoon."

"We will do just as you wish, dear. Are you going to tell her to-night?"

"I am not quite sure. I have not got it all decided yet; but I do not think it will be till to-morrow. I am tired to-night."

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She looked so, pale and tired both; Lord Tewksbury saw this with some compunction.

"Lady Clare," he said, "let me tell the story. Why should you have the worry of it? Surely I am strong enough to bear the burden of my own name and identity."

She smiled a tired little smile.

"Perhaps you shall," she said, "but not to-night, please. I want to have time to think. Come to-morrow at five, as I said; and if I have not told the secret, you must tell it for yourself."

"To be sure; and do not let it bother you any more. I shall have to turn doctor again and order you back to the sofa, if you look so pale and worn."

"I am tired," admitted little Lady Clare; "but it has been a very nice day—a very nice birthday."

"It has for me at least," answered Lord Tewksbury; "and next spring twelvemonth I shall hope to have a very nice birthday myself. But that will depend upon you, Lady Clare."

Clare's colour deepened a little.

"How?"

"Why, because I shall hate coming of age and all the flummery of the thing unless you will be there, at Castle St. Maur, to see it all too, and show everybody that we are friends at last."

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CHAPTER XII.

RECONCILIATION.

"I CALL it all very stupid. I wonder Clare has not more spirit! Lady Tewksbury, however, won't be got over so easily."

"Ah! there's no knowing. We are not all so consistent and downright as you are, Nell—and a good thing, too—or what would become of a weather-cock like me?"

"He had no business to come here under a false name. Duke had no right to bring him. I hate subterfuges!"

"Take care, or he will hear you."

"I don't care if he does."

Nell always spoke with a sort of gentle deliberation, often oddly at variance with the words she uttered. She was in the breakfast-room now with Eric, and her clear tones carried far in the still, summer air. I heard distinctly every word of the brief colloquy, and so did Lord Tewksbury, who was also in the garden approaching the house by another path. He smiled

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slightly, lifting his hat by way of greeting; then he stepped over the low window-sill.

"So, Miss Nell, you are going to be a more implacable foe than those I had looked to encounter. How is that? I thought here, at least, I was sure of friends and allies."

Nell coloured slightly, but stood to her colours.

"I don't like false names, Lord Tewksbury."

"Neither do I, Miss Nell. I am very glad to drop mine."

"You need never have assumed it."

"Very true; but I did assume it, and I hope it has served my purpose. Are you as hard upon every hero of history who has ever assumed an *incog?* Did your favourite Stuarts never disguise themselves beneath another name?"

"They had good cause."

"Excuse me, if the thing is really wrong nothing and no excuse can justify it. If not, I have as much a right to a temporary disguise as anybody else, and my object in assuming it has not been one of selfish amusement, or without a definite, and as I assert, a legitimate object. I never said my name was Tuke. I am called so by half my friends, and you have made me Mr. Tuke yourselves. At the same time I assert my right to assume another name if I have good

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NELL RECEIVES LORD TEWKSBURY'S EXPLANATION.

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reason to do so. Your real quarrel with me, Miss Nell, is not that I called myself Mr. Tuke, but that I am Lord Tewksbury."

Nell stood still, looking at him, turning his answer over in her mind. Its out-spoken honesty appealed to her at once.

"Perhaps it is," she said presently. "I think you may be right, though I did not know it before."

"And it is rather an odd thing to quarrel with a man for being himself, don't you think, or because he is not quite such a cad as you hoped he would be."

Eric went off into a shout of laughter, remembering to what he alluded. Nell's colour flew up, but she did not waver in her steady regard of him.

"When I said that, of course, I did not know to whom I was speaking. I was repeating what I had heard."

"Exactly; that is understood. Your words were to the effect that 'if he were anything like you, Mr. Tuke,' things would be vastly different. Now, if you were honest in what you said then, Miss Nell, you ought to be ready to admit that they *are* different now, and that I am more to be pitied for the unenviable position I occupy, than to be blamed for it —or hated."

He had caught Nell very neatly in a trap of her

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own setting. This appeal to her honesty and good faith could not be set aside; it touched her in her tenderest part; for Nell was honest to her heart's core. Perhaps it was because she was so honest that she was often hard.

"I did mean what I said, and I mean it still. I was quite wrong in what I thought about Lord Tewksbury, if you are he, and I am not ashamed to say so and to beg your pardon. It is not your fault, of course, and if you feel about it as you said the other day, there is no rational reason why they shouldn't make friends with you."

"And you too, Miss Nell?"

"Oh, I have nothing to do with it," she answered half laughing, half defiant. "I am not worth considering. You are Duke's friend, and in that sense ours too. I'm rather tired of grand people and titles. I should like you better if you were Mr. Tuke still, and had not made me eat my words. But it can't be helped, and it would be small to bear malice, so if you care about it we will be friends too."

So Nell was partially won over in that way, and I could not help taking it as a good augury for the future. For my own part, I felt that I would sooner have to convince Lady Tewksbury of any moot point than my clever, downright sister Nell.

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I wondered much what was passing at Deerhurst, and what Clare had said or done; but until the appointed hour arrived there was no means of ascertaining this.

I think Lord Tewksbury was a little excited and restless as the day went on. He was sincerely anxious for a complete reconciliation, not a mere make-believe that would leave matters practically very much where they were. He wanted the right to visit his kinswomen, and to be visited by them. He wanted to feel that they did not resent his presence at Castle St. Maur, and that they would not feel alienated altogether from the place because it was his home. He wanted to learn from those who had lived there before him, all the traditions of the place, that he might carry out any of the wishes of the late owner that he could learn.

Altogether he spoke very nicely about things, and he was evidently really fond of sweet little Lady Clare. He wished he had been her brother, he said in his frank, boyish way, and then she need never have left her home. He hated the thought that he had turned her out, and made me tell him all about her arrival here, and her sorrow at leaving the place of her birth.

I was sorry he insisted so on hearing every detail, but I told him all he wanted to know, and as I did so

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a look of purpose gathered on his face, giving it an added manliness.

"Some day, perhaps," I heard him mutter beneath his breath, "I will bring her back there."

I confess I felt a little nervous and excited when at length we started upon our walk to the Park. I had great hopes that the reconciliation was about to be accomplished, and yet I could not feel secure until I had absolutely witnessed it with my own eyes. I had a latent fear that the door of the stately mansion might be closed against us with the ominous message, "Not at home."

I think Lord Tewksbury shared to a certain extent this feeling.

"I wonder how the old lady will receive me," he said as we neared the door. "She is a St. Maur to the backbone, and we are a tenacious, obstinate race."

"You have been a favourite so far," I said.

"Exactly; and no one is so thoroughly detested as a discarded favourite."

"I wonder if Clare will have told?" I remarked.

"I can't hazard a guess. It's rather difficult to make a dignified entry under such circumstances; but one must do the best one can."

The gray-headed family butler opened the door to us with an alacrity that suggested the idea of his

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having been waiting for our arrival. His face, however, was blank and solemn as he ushered us across the hall and, throwing wide the drawing-room doors, announced in loud tones:

"Miss Melville and Lord Tewksbury."

We exchanged quick glances. This was evidently Clare's doing; the servant had undoubtedly received his instructions from her little ladyship. The next moment we were entering the room.

Clare and her grandmother were standing together at the farther end in the great bay. I saw Lady Tewksbury's glance fall upon us and then go beyond us, much as Clare's had done on the previous day. Her face was pale and rather set. I detected a certain tension of mind, as indicated both by her expression and her attitude.

Lady Clare came quickly forward. She kissed me, and then taking my companion by the hand she led him forward.

"Grandmother," she said very quietly, "this is Lord Tewksbury, may I present him to you as a friend?"

For a moment there was a pause, in which the fall of a pin might have been heard. To me it seemed very long, but I suppose it lasted but a few seconds. My heart was beating very fast.

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Then Lady Tewksbury held out her hand, though the lines of her face did not relax.

"This is a surprise, Lord Tewksbury," she said slowly. "Be good enough to be seated."

We all sat down then; and Clare came and leaned against my knee. I could feel that she was trembling somewhat.

"My granddaughter told me of the meeting yesterday; she told me she had ventured to ask Lord Tewksbury here this afternoon. I expected him; yet—"

"Yet you expected a total stranger instead of one who had already partaken of your hospitality and good will. I know you did. I have come to make my apologies, Lady Tewksbury; am I to lose everything I hoped I had gained for the one sin of being myself?"

He spoke with a mixture of frank boyishness and straightforward manliness that I felt would tell in his favour. He was not afraid of Lady Tewksbury, and that in itself gave him an advantage. Like others of her temperament, she did not like people to be afraid.

Still her face did not relax. She look gravely across at her granddaughter.

"Clare, how long have you known this?"

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"Since yesterday afternoon."

"You had no suspicion before?"

"No."

"Indeed, Lady Tewksbury, Lady Clare was as much astonished as any one could be," said the young man. "I am the guilty party, and Duke Melville my only accomplice. Miss Melville guessed our secret by and by; but of course she could not betray us. The fault is all mine; but the temptation was very great."

"The temptation?"

"Yes, to come and see you, to make your acquaintance; to see if we could not manage to be friends in spite of everything. You see I feel such a—well what shall I call it?—such a detestable animal for succeeding to what ought to be Lady Clare's property, that I don't wonder you declined to have anything to say to me or mine. I felt it myself; that is why I did not dare to present myself at Castle St. Maur whilst you were there, or ask to see you. I felt that this usurpation, coming on the top of the old feeling that seems to have been cherished by our respected ancestors, would be quite too much. I begged my guardian to say what he could for me; but he did nothing but suggest a reconciliation on my majority, which is still some time off. At first when I heard that, I supposed I must wait till then before doing anything."

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He paused, but nobody broke the silence and so he took up his tale again.

"Now, a few months back I met with Melville at Oxford, and he told me about you, and I wanted more than ever to make your acquaintance and apologize if I could for the harm I have unwittingly done you. He kindly asked me to come to the Rectory, which I was glad enough to do; and then the idea came into one of our heads that I should come under a feigned name, and see what my native worth would do for me. Perhaps it was a liberty to take, Lady Tewksbury, and I am sure I am ready to apologize for it with all my heart. I did not half like the game when I had begun to play it; but you were so kind, and Lady Clare was so friendly that I could not resist the temptation of enjoying your society a little longer. I do not know what you will say to me now; but if you can possibly manage to swallow the difference between Tuke and Tewksbury, and transfer to the latter the favour you vouchsafed to the former, I do assure you that he will not be ungrateful, and will do his best to merit it."

I think all our eyes were fixed on Lady Tewksbury's face. It was not a face easy to read, and for a few moments its lines were so severe that I feared our guest was pleading his cause in vain. Then all in a

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moment it softened in an inexplicable fashion, and, as it seemed, without moving a muscle.

"You have no mother to teach you better, or to plead your cause for you," she said with one of her rare, sweet smiles. "I suppose I must forgive you, and call you a friend. Is that your wish, Clare?"

The child's face lighted suddenly.

"Yes, Grandmother dear," she answered quickly, "We are friends already, you know. We have always been friends from the first."

Lady Tewksbury gave the young man her hand, which he took with a great deal of respect and frank pleasure. He bore himself very well during this decidedly trying scene.

"It is a strange way of making up a difference that has lasted more than a couple of centuries. But perhaps it is time it were laid aside."

"Time-honoured institutions become a nuisance in time," remarked Lord Tewksbury, "and you can't think what a relief it is to me to feel that I can come to you for advice and assistance about this property. You see my guardian knows nothing about it, and I less than nothing. I'm a good Tory, Lady Tewksbury, and I like things to go on in the old way—the old traditions respected, and old customs kept up. Reform and renovation are excellent things in their

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way; but people are much too fond now-a-days, I think, of turning the world topsy-turvy under the name of reform. They would reform a man out of his own skin if they could manage it, and some day perhaps they will. As I've got to manage the St. Maur property—I don't want to, but I shall have it to do—I mean to try and manage it in the old way, and there is no one who can tell me how I ought to go about things as you can, Lady Tewksbury. You've lived at the Castle almost all your life, and if anyone knows the ways of the place, it's you. If I can only persuade you to come there with Lady Clare when I come of age, and put me in the way of things, and set me going on the right track, I shall be your eternal debtor. Then I shall feel that I have somebody behind me, and if I get off the tracks you will set me right again. It will make all the difference in the world if you will do this. I don't know if I've a right to ask it so early on in our acquaintance, but its rather difficult to remember that we were only introduced this afternoon; and I've had this on my mind so long, that the only wonder is that it never came out before!"

It evidently had been on his mind, one could see that by his earnestness and covert eagerness. The least touch of effort would have spoilt everything—made it appear as if all this had been planned as a

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sort of bait to flatter Lady Tewksbury and catch her favour, but the frank sincerity with which it was spoken carried its own testimony, and won the day. She was no mean reader of character, and was very keen to detect the false from the true. As it was, this frank appeal for assistance was as good a move as the young man could possibly have made.

"I will certainly think it over," she answered with a stately graciousness that was far from discouraging. "It is early to make any promise; but I shall always be interested in the welfare of the St. Maur property, and the people whose lives are bound up in it. If I can do anything to make matters more smooth for all it will give me great satisfaction."

Clare gave my hand a little squeeze. Practically the day was won. The child heaved a sigh of relief, as if a great weight had rolled off her mind.

"It is done now," she whispered to me as we said good-bye. "It is done and nothing can ever undo it now. I am so glad. It was a sort of worry, and I used to be afraid I might change my mind or get cold and proud so that it would never be done. I am so happy! Now we shall be friends always, and some day I am sure I shall see my dear home again."

There was certainly no doubt from that day forward as to the footing upon which Lord Tewksbury was re-

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ceived at Deerhurst. He stayed with us some few weeks longer, but I am bound to say his time was spent as much at the Park as at the Rectory.

Lady Tewksbury did not do things by halves, and having accepted the young man as a friend and kinsman, she made him welcome to all the hospitality of the house. As for little Lady Clare, she seemed to look upon him as a big brother and loyal subject always at her command, and ready to do her pleasure; and he never disappointed her, or grew weary of her service.

He had a very chivalrous feeling towards the little girl he felt he had defrauded of her rights, and the more demands she made upon his time and his good will, the better he seemed pleased.

He had no real home of his own, though he was well off in other ways. He had plenty of family connections, but few near relations. He had no wish to reside at Castle St. Maur until he had attained his majority, and could take the reins of government into his own hand, and meantime he accepted with pleased alacrity an invitation to spend his Christmas at Deerhurst "if nothing more attractive offered."

"Don't build your hopes upon that, Lady Tewksbury," he said laughingly when the invitation was tendered. "You may be quite sure that nothing more attractive can offer."

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He had come to say good-bye at last. The vacation was waning, and he had not made one of the many visits he had planned. The few days he had meant to stay with us had extended to as many weeks, and even now he was reluctant to leave.

I saw the parting between him and little Lady Clare, as she stood on the terrace steps to say a last good-bye. The sunlight shone like gold upon her wealth of hair, her face was very bright, despite the shadow of regret that rested upon it. Lord Tewksbury stood a few steps below her, on the broad stone stairs that led down to the carriage-drive, and looked smilingly into her face.

"Good-bye, Lady Clare; you will not quite forget me?"

"Of course not, Tuke. I shall miss you very much. But you will come again soon, you know?"

"At Christmas—yes."

"Don't forget—mind you are not to go anywhere else. If you do—"

"You need not be afraid. There is no danger. I shall turn up again at Deerhurst the moment I can get away."

"And you will be a good boy and work hard, and be a credit to the family?"

"I will do my best."

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"And next time you row in a race I shall try to come and see you."

"Do! we shall be sure to win!"

She laughed a merry, childish laugh.

"Good-bye, Tuke. I'm so sorry you're going; but it won't be for very long after all. And oh! I'm *so* pleased that we've made up that silly old family feud!"

"So am I; and we'll never have another, will we, Lady Clare?"

"Indeed no, that would be too silly. We are friends now, and real friends never quarrel, do they? Good-bye, Tuke dear. Good-bye."

He took her hands again and raised them once to his lips, and running down the steps, vaulted over the railing and was gone.

Clare stood looking after him with a smile. I was sure the family feud was quite over for ever.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THREE LETTERS.

SINCE I have begun my task of writing this story for my little cousins, I have received some letters from the people with whom I have been concerned that I think might as well be given here as a sort of finale to the tale.

Young Lord Tewksbury has just come of age. He is now at Castle St. Maur, taking possession, so to speak, for the first time of the fine old property that has descended upon him from Clare's parents.

And little Lady Clare and Lady Tewksbury are both at the castle now, gracing with their presence the festivities that are being held in honour of the young earl, and showing to all the world that the old feud is laid at rest for ever.

Lord Tewksbury is quite like an old friend now, not only at our rectory house, but at Deerhurst itself. Every vacation since he has been introduced to us, he has come down again to see us and our neighbours,

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and sometimes I have fancied that even Lady Tewksbury herself forgets that there ever has been a feud.

He is always devoted to Clare. It seems as if he felt he could never do enough for her, to make up for the injustice of the law which gave to him what might otherwise have been her birthright. I think it is a pretty sight to see them together; he is so frank and manly and chivalrous, whilst there is a dainty charm about the little lady which is beyond my powers of description.

I think she is, in her way, as fond of "Tuke" as he is of her. She always calls him by that name, and so do the boys; in fact we all of us think of him as Tuke, and he seems to like to be so dubbed at our house. Nell keeps somewhat ceremonious still, but the rest of us have accepted him as a friend and comrade. We all like him very much, and should feel ourselves defrauded of a right if a vacation were to pass without bringing him to see us.

Little Lady Clare calls him the best boy in the world, and says it is like having a brother when he is there. But he never calls her sister, and never takes any of the jesting liberties that a brother might. His gentle deference towards her is very pretty, I think; and I am sure it not only wins her heart, but also that of her sterner grandmother. I often see Lady Tewks-

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bury regarding them steadfastly; and sometimes I fancy I can guess at the thoughts that are stirring within her as she watches them together.

However, it is not perhaps for me to hint at my suspicions. Lady Tewksbury keeps her own counsel, and I can only guess at what she thinks and feels.

But it is something more than guesswork to surmise that she has laid aside all the old enmity when she is actually Lord Tewksbury's guest at Castle St. Maur. I never actually knew whether she would make up her mind to go herself, nor, as it seemed, did Clare, till just at the last, as the following letter will show. I received it a few days ago—the first of the three I have had during the past week. I will quote them all just as they stand, and without comment, as they tell their own tale well enough.

I.

"Castle St. Maur, April 29th.

"Dearest Magdalen,

"I wonder if you will be at all surprised to see that heading to my letter. I don't suppose you will, after all you know about us; but I am sure you will be pleased to hear that I am not here alone, and that Grandmother is with me.

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"You know I did not feel at all certain what she was going to do up till the very last. Of course I knew she liked Tuke, and felt nothing but good-will towards him; but it did not follow even then that she would feel able to go back to the castle, where she had ruled so long as mistress, merely as a visitor, or that she would care to meet all the other St. Maurs, Tuke's relations, about whom she knew nothing at all. Even I, though I like Tuke so much, and really wished in my heart of hearts to go—even I felt that it would be rather hard to go back as a stranger. But I intended to do it because I felt it would be right, and I knew I should be sorry afterwards if I didn't; but I could not feel at all sure of Grandmother, and I determined I would not worry her by questions. She would tell me when she had really decided.

"I do not know exactly if she had decided or what, when just a few days ago Tuke turned up and told us he had come to fetch us. He and Grandmother had a long talk together, and then I knew it was all settled; for she told me when I went to bed that night that we were all going to Castle St. Maur together the next day but one. I was so glad to hear that, for I had dreaded going without her; but we, neither of us, expected the sort of reception we got. Tuke kept that all to himself.

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"We travelled together, and got to the station about four o'clock. A big open landau was waiting for us, and the horses were all decorated, and everything had a gala air as if it was a grand day. Tuke put us in the seats of honour and sat opposite us himself, and I thought he looked rather full of mischief and fun. Well, as soon as we got near the village all the bells began to ring, and soon we found ourselves passing under green arches with 'Welcome' and 'Good Wishes' and all sorts of words like that written in primroses and daffodils; and all the people came out and cheered and waved hats and handkerchiefs as we went by; and the tenantry came out on horseback and formed a sort of bodyguard; and there was such a shouting and cheering that it almost made me cry. Of course, it was all prepared for Tuke; but somehow he made it seem as if it was for us too, and I know the people *were* pleased to see us again, for they called our names and cheered louder than ever when they saw us. And altogether it was so nice and so exciting that all the sadness went quite away, and somehow being received with Tuke himself took away all the feeling of coming as strangers. It seemed as if we still belonged to the castle, and I know Tuke wanted us to feel it, and it was very nice of him.

"There are about a dozen people staying in the

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house, his relations and friends, and really they are very nice; but I see more of Tuke than of anyone, for he likes me to take him all over the dear old place, and tell him all about it, and show him my favourite rooms, and say exactly what I should do to them all if I were mistress here. It is very amusing, and we make lots and lots of plans together. The day after to-morrow he comes of age, and there are to be all kinds of grand doings. I don't mean to post this letter till I have told you all about them. We have been here three days, but I have not had a moment to write before. We have our old rooms, and they are just as we left them. Grandmother takes the head of the table and Tuke the foot; and he treats us just as if we were the hostesses, and Grandmother does the honours to all the other guests, and feels sometimes as if she had never been away. It is so nice of Tuke, I think, to think of all these things. Some people would be jealous of their prerogative and would rather keep out of the way of those who had gone before, or keep them in the background as much as possible; but there is nothing small in Tuke like that. He seems to want us to share all the honours with him, and he has won Grandmother's heart altogether by the way he consults her and defers to her wishes.

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"May 2nd.

"Well, it is all over now, and it was very amusing and very nice. I don't think I can tell you nearly all in a letter, but I shall like to talk about it when we meet, and describe every single thing.

"You know it was a lovely day, and all the tenants came and played games in the park; and there was an ox roasted whole in the yard, and all sorts of funny things such as one reads about in old books. I think it was all very mediæval, though Tuke laughs when I say so, and calls it all a modern humbug. But at any-rate the people enjoyed it all immensely, and they took to Tuke directly; he has such nice, merry, friendly ways. There was an immense tent put up for the big dinner for the tenants, and when Tuke went in to have his health drunk he took Grandmother on one arm and me on the other, and would not go in without us. And he made *such* a nice speech in answer to the toast. Most young men are so nervous, or so bashful, or so self-conscious that they can't make a good speech, anyhow; at least, they can't *say* it, though they may have thought it out beforehand all right. But Tuke wasn't like that a bit, and he spoke just as naturally as if he made speeches every day, and he said such nice things about Grandmother and me that I hardly knew how to stand

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by and listen; and the people cheered and drank our healths and made *such* a fuss.

"After dinner there were more games, and we watched for a good while; but then we had to go in, because there was a big dinner party at the castle, and I was to sit up for it, and go in to dinner as if I was grown up.

"That was all Tuke's doing; for you know Grandmother is very strict about those things, and wouldn't hear of it at first. But Tuke declared he would not have a dinner party at all if I did not dine, and at last Grandmother gave way, and I was allowed to come. It was a huge round table we dined at, in the big banqueting-hall. Tuke took me in, and we sat together, with Grandmother and old Lord Mainwaring opposite and the other guests all round. The table was covered with flowers and the beautiful old St. Maur silver that I used sometimes to see, years ago, when we had state parties; and it was all very grand. But I enjoyed it very much, and Tuke talked to me nearly all the time; and after he had returned thanks for his toast, he proposed Grandmother and me, and I was so surprised I felt quite shy, for I never was at anything like it before. Lord Mainwaring returned thanks for us, and said some very nice things about the union of the two branches, and hoped the fusion

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would be more and more complete as years went by. And everyone looked pleased and kind, and altogether it was all very nice, though I was very tired at the end of the day, and am rather tired still; for it was quite exciting you see, although so very pleasant.

"We are to stay on for another week at the castle, and then Tuke goes back to Oxford and we go home. I hope you will soon be back there, for I feel as if I had so much to tell you that can never be put into a letter. Good-bye, dear Magdalen. It is so nice that there is no feud, and never can be now. It seems quite ridiculous that we could ever have been angry with Tuke. As Eric says, it wasn't the least bit his fault. He couldn't help it any more than we could; and he is just like a brother to me now, so that it would be quite silly to be vexed. Indeed, I don't think many brothers are quite as nice to their sisters as Tuke is to me. I'm so glad your brother brought him to us that vacation. I am so glad to see my dear old home again, and feel there is no more feud.

"Yours very affectionately,

"CLARE ST. MAUR."

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II.

"Castle St. Maur, May 9th.

"My dear Magdalen,

"I think you may be pleased to hear that our festivities here have gone off most successfully, and that dear Clare has thoroughly enjoyed herself, and is looking all the better for change of air and scene.

"For my own part, I confess that the pleasure has not been unmixed; but I do not in the least regret having brought the child, as my presence has been a help and comfort to her, and has shown to the neighbourhood that the change of dynasty is to be accepted in good part.

"Tewksbury behaves very well, and with great propriety of feeling. He errs upon the side of bringing Clare and myself too prominently forward, treating us too much as if we still belonged to the place; but the error is a generous one, the natural outcome of youth and inexperience, and I have not felt it needful to check him, as I should have felt obliged to do had Clare been older. As it is, she accepts everything in a perfectly childlike spirit and seems in no danger of having her head turned.

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"It is a great comfort to find that Tewksbury is a true St. Maur. The likeness to some members of the family comes out so strongly now and again, that I wonder I never observed it in the days of our early acquaintance when he was only Mr. Tuke.

"We had very gay doings at the castle on the first. Some of it was rather painful to me, remembering as I did so well the coming of age of the last earl. But all was new to Clare, and she enjoyed herself thoroughly. I believe she has written you a detailed account herself, so I will not attempt to add to it. My object in writing is to let you know—and through you, my esteemed friend Dr. Melville—that all the old bitterness of feeling is entirely a thing of the past, and that I feel a sense of gratitude to him for the share, conscious or unconscious, he has had in bringing about the union. I think I can truly say that it was his silent yet visible regret at the hostility between the branches of our house that first made me reconsider the whole question, whilst undoubtedly your influence upon Clare changed her view of the matter. To your brother we owe the introduction of Tewksbury in a fashion that materially helped to smooth the way, and I cannot but wish to tender my thanks to all the family for their assistance in a consummation for which I can now feel thankful.

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"It is undoubtedly better for the child to lose all sad associations with her old home, and if ever we visit it again, as Tewksbury is urgent that we shall do, we shall neither of us dread the thought of it as we could not but do before. Altogether, matters are on a far more satisfactory basis than I once deemed it possible; and I am sincerely glad of it.

"I trust you have good accounts from home, and that we shall shortly see you there when your labour of love is ended. Clare is very anxious to see you and tell you all her doings. She thinks you will be more 'sympathetic,' she tells me, than my favourite, Nell! Perhaps the child is right. Nell would hardly have aided as you did in the work of peace and good-will.

"Believe me, yours very truly,

"ELIZABETH TEWKSBURY."

III.

"Castle St. Maur, May 10th.

"Dear Miss Melville,

"I did not realize when I wrote a general letter of thanks for the very beautiful present you all sent me on the first, that you yourself were not at home; but I heard about your movements from Clare

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before she left, and she gave me your address. I hope, therefore, that you will let me employ this first lonely evening in telling you a little about recent events, for you have always been an interested spectator of our little drama, and have had a large share in the bringing about of this reconciliation. So, at least, Clare always says; and I am convinced that she speaks no more than the truth.

"I was afraid up to the very last that Lady Tewksbury would escape me, not that she bore me any ill-will, but because she would naturally shrink from witnessing festivities at the castle which must be so fraught with old associations. So I thought the safest way would be just to go and fetch them both, and I believe you have heard from Clare of the success of my mission.

"But what you will not have heard from her is the perfectly charming way in which she conducted herself, winning all hearts, and drawing out love towards herself from everybody she met.

"Of course, there has been no need to talk of that side of the question, but perhaps it will not surprise you very much to hear that some of my near relatives amongst the St. Maurs were almost as bitter against old Lady Tewksbury and her granddaughter as they had been against them. I have never clearly under-

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stood the ground for all the ill-feeling. Indeed, I incline to the opinion that it was for the most part traditional and hereditary, the result of prejudice, not of conviction. But, at anyrate, whatever the cause, there was no mistaking the effect, and I was sometimes half afraid lest I had undertaken a task somewhat beyond my powers. Luckily the hospitality I have lately received at Deerhurst has done much to soften asperities, and gone far to convince my people that no real ground of grievance remained; and, of course, no one with a spark of right feeling could fail to see something almost pathetic in the return of Lady Tewksbury and Clare to the castle as visitors, when for so long it had been their home. My late guardian, who is also my uncle, had not got on particularly well with Lady Tewksbury the first time they met; but, of course, under the circumstances, that was hardly to be wondered at. He promised, however, to do all in his power to make matters smooth now, and my aunts and cousins were equally ready with their promises. I did not, therefore, anticipate any open rupture; but I was in a horrid fear that there might be, at anyrate at first, a sort of chronic friction which might be almost worse.

"You know I came of age on the first of this month, and the party was to assemble on the twenty-seventh

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and twenty-eighth of April. I arrived on the first of those days, and brought Lady Tewksbury and Clare with me. It pleased the people immensely that they should share in the reception they gave me; for, although they were very kind about it, of course I was a perfect stranger to them, and one whom they could hardly be predisposed to like, whereas Clare had been born amongst them and had lived nearly all her life on the property. And her forefathers had owned it before her for ever so many generations. Naturally they looked upon her, not upon me, as the child of the house, and it was pleasant to see the enthusiasm her presence excited amongst them.

"There is something very charming about Clare—such a curious, characteristic blending of the child and the woman. She is as sweet and frank and natural as a little child, yet with a sort of dignity of her own that might make her appear older than her age. I am glad she still wears her hair in the old flowing fashion, and that she does not grow tall, but looks the same graceful little Lady Clare that I knew first. I think the old lady is wise in keeping her a child as long as she can. With her quickness and thoughtful temperament she will develop quite fast enough without any encouragement from without. I feel as if I should like to keep her always as she is—yet I don't

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really. Some day I hope—well, never mind what. It would sound ridiculous written down.

"The meeting with the other St. Maurs came off next day. I was awfully nervous, I can tell you, beforehand; but, thanks to Clare's pretty tact, everything went as smoothly as possible. They were all charmed with her—they couldn't well help themselves, and she wasn't the least bit embarrassed or self-conscious, and seemed to have no idea what an important part she was playing. Lady Tewksbury began by being rather terribly grand and stately, but somehow she softened down wonderfully when she saw how much Clare was admired, and she played hostess for me as courteously and affably as anyone possibly could do. I had to ask some lady to do the honours, and of course no one was so suitable as Lady Tewksbury.

"The 'coming of age,' as people please to call it, was rather a bore. There was a lot of flummery and tomfoolery, which Clare seemed to enjoy a good deal more than I did. I suppose it was the right thing to give the people a holiday and a big feed, and make them think it's all very fine; but, in my case, there seemed a fearful lot of humbug in it; for, of course, I knew I was a kind of a sort of an interloper, and that everybody knew it in their heart of hearts. If Clare had been a boy everything would have been hers, or

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if she had had a brother I should never have been toasted and fêted, and made to think myself a big man. A fellow can't help knowing that a couple of years back the whole county was lamenting the lack of an heir of the old branch; so one felt that there was a good deal of humbug in making such a rejoicing over the new man. I don't mean that the people were insincere exactly; only it is, after all, nothing more or less than making the best of a bad job, and cannot possibly be the same thing as if I had belonged to the old stock.

"Never mind, though; let them wait and see. If I can't be a real old St. Maur of the right sort I'll do the next best things one of these days if I can, and make up to them in the best way possible. We shall see. I've got an idea in the back of my head; but, of course, it may all come to nothing. I don't know if you guess what I mean; but it's not a thing a fellow can write down in cold blood.

"Well, we got through all the merry-making pretty successfully. The tenants and people enjoyed it if we didn't; and, thanks to our debating society at Oxford, I managed to get through all my speeches without any actual breakdown. A fellow feels an awful fool on such occasions. I can only hope I didn't look such an ass as I felt.

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"After all the tomfoolery was over we had a very nice week of it. Some of the people left, and the half dozen that stayed on amalgamated very pleasantly. I had a little trouble to get Lady Tewksbury to stop on, but Clare pleaded the cause so successfully that we won the day. The child looked wonderfully better and brighter for the visit to her old home, and there were heaps of people she wanted to see and places she wished to visit again. So it ended by their both stopping a whole week longer. The weather was magnificent, and we had picnics or rides or drives every day. Clare showed me all her favourite haunts, and we had fine times altogether, and in the end Lady Tewksbury almost promised that she would come again another time and bring Clare also. I am to go to Deerhurst for part of the 'long' this year, and she is going to take Clare to Switzerland later on. The child is eager to see snow mountains, and to climb some of them too. She and I have a nice little plot together, which is for me to join them at Chamounix or Zermatt, and take her little ladyship up one or two easy ascents.

"I daresay we shall carry our plan into effect too. Perhaps Duke will join me in a walking tour over the Alps. He will not mind the addition of little Lady Clare to some of our expeditions. She wants to get

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to the top of M. Blanc; but I have not promised anything beyond the Grand Mulets. If you would come too, we might manage the whole ascent; but she would want a companion like yourself if we did anything involving us in a night in one of the huts. The child has all the spirit and ambition of her race, but she may not have the strength for any very great achievement. However, she likes making plans, and she can certainly command my services whenever she needs them.

"Well, I am inflicting an unconscionably long letter upon you, but you need not trouble to read it unless you like. The fact is that I am all alone in this big old house to-night, and find it rather dull and dreary. As I can't talk to anybody, having no companions save the grim old family portraits, who seem as if they decidedly resented my presence here, the next best thing is to write a letter to someone who is kind enough to take a little interest in family matters.

"Lady Tewksbury and her granddaughter left this afternoon, and I go to Oxford to-morrow. The house isn't like itself without Clare. One thing I am quite resolved upon—never to live in this bare old place alone. It is a very fine house and all that, but it's uncommonly dreary when there isn't a soul to speak to, and when all the big rooms stand empty and deso-

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late. It seems to me as if it wants Clare's golden hair to bring the sunshine into Castle St. Maur. There's a pretty little bit of sentiment and poetry for you! But I think you would agree with me if you had seen the place with her, and then were to see it without.

"Well, I really must stop, and see about putting my things together for to-morrow. I mean to work awfully hard now and take a good degree if I can. Clare wants me to go in for honours and come out a double first or something, but I'm afraid she must moderate her expectations somewhat. Anyway, I'll do what I can, and not disgrace the St. Maurs if I can help it.

"I'm awfully glad the old feud is entirely a thing of the past, and I should like to thank you for the share Clare tells me you have had in bringing matters to a satisfactory and happy end. I hope I shall see you again in the course of a couple of months, and that you and Duke will think seriously of Switzerland.

"Yours very truly,

"TEWKSBURY."

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CONCLUSION.

AND now I really have done my story, having brought it down to the present moment; but for the edification of my little cousins I have from time to time added a conclusion of my own, which they seem to wish me to do still.

I began by saying I should hardly dare to do this, lest by any chance it should get round to Lady Tewksbury again; but really, after the letters I have just received, especially the one from Lord Tewksbury himself, it really does not seem as if I need be so very diffident. Duke told him once he had the power to give little Lady Clare her old home back again, and really I begin to think he is seriously contemplating the possibility of doing so.

Once Lady Tewksbury would have set her face resolutely against any such solution of the difficulty; but then Lady Tewksbury is not what she was then, and from the way in which I have seen her often watch them, I am convinced that she has her own

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thoughts about them, which are not so very, very different from those of other people.

And now, after the general reconciliation with the whole family which has just taken place at Castle St. Maur, her old prejudice and sore feeling will die away more and more completely. It is so nice when people cease feeling angry and hurt, and make friends and live happily together. It is very kind of the Tewksburys and Clare to talk as if I had had a great deal to do with it, and to say such pretty things; but really I hardly did or said anything. I often used to feel that I did not speak out enough, only I have grown old enough to learn that it is not wise always to say just what comes into our heads, even though that something may be true and right enough. Nell would say differently, I daresay, but when she grows older she will understand more as I do.

And now, if I am really to make a sort of make-believe ending to my story, I must look a little way into the guessing mirror, and when I do so this is what I see—

Clare grows more lovely every year; partly, I believe, because her nature grows more sweet and unselfish. I think Lord Tewksbury notices this, and loves her all the better for it. He does love her, I am sure, though she is little more than a child; and I think Lady Tewks-

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bury notices it too, for she often watches them together, and a curious light comes into her eyes, half pleased and eager, and half sad. I am still a little afraid of Lady Tewksbury; but I am fond of her too, and I think I understand her better than I did.

Clare is only a child now, or rather, perhaps, I should say a girl, for she will be fifteen next birthday; but before many years have passed she will be a woman—a beautiful young lady, quite as beautiful as any that one reads of in fairy tales, I am sure, with her lovely golden hair and dark violet eyes.

Lord Tewksbury, too, will grow up into a fine handsome man; and every year he will come to see her, and they will learn to love each other more and more every time. And presently I think, when the right time comes, he will tell her he loves her, and will ask her to marry him, and come and live with him in the fine old castle she loves so much; which he will have made more beautiful than ever to receive her. And I think she will say yes, and I know Lady Tewksbury will give them her blessing; and then there will be a grand wedding from Deerhurst, and all the people will turn out to see it, and little Lady Clare will be the most beautiful bride that ever was seen, in her long white robes and her beautiful flowing veil.

Perhaps a bishop will marry them; but I think

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most likely it will be our dear father, who knows and loves them both so well. And I think pretty Nell will be one of the bridesmaids, and perhaps little Trixie, too; and Eric will be there, almost a man himself, and as devoted as ever to the bride, though she does have a title, and he does call himself a republican —only, perhaps, by that time he will be at Oxford, and have changed his views again.

And then they will go away together in a grand carriage, with four white horses (perhaps); and after travelling about a little they will go back to Castle St. Maur, and the bells will be rung, and there will be arches of flowers all across the road, and the tenants will come out to welcome their new mistress; who will not be new to them, after all, but the little Lady Clare whom they have known more or less all her life. Only she will not be Lady Clare any more, but Lady Tewksbury; and that shows that it is quite time I wound up my tale and stopped, for I only promised to tell the story of little Lady Clare.

THE END.

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